

# Kumina: A Kongo-Based Tradition in the New World

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In eastern Jamaica, scattered through several parishes, live a large number of persons who refer to themselves as 'Africans,' and who claim membership in what they call the 'Bongo Nation.' Most of these persons are not Rastafarians, although many of them share with their Rasta brethren a feeling of exile.<sup>1</sup> They look not to Ethiopia, but to the Congo-Angola region of Central Africa and the 'Guinea Coast' of West Africa; it is there that the oldest ancestors dwell. Members of this loose-knit 'nation' of people, dispersed as they are, still possess a common cultural heritage. The cement which binds them together is a ceremonial tradition known as *Kumina*, also known simply as 'the African Dance.' *Kumina* is indeed an 'African form of dance,' but it is a great deal more than this. It is a religion, a worldview, and a living cultural preserve.

The *Kumina* tradition has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Some writers have been quick to place this religion alongside the well-documented, older Afro-American religions, such as Cuban Santería or Haitian Vodun. Others have been more cautious and raised the possibility that *Kumina* stems primarily from post-Emancipation

developments. Some have postulated that it is a transplanted Ashanti ritual, others that it is a Dahomean survival, and still others have suggested Congolese roots.<sup>2</sup> It is only recently, however, that serious historical research on *Kumina* has been undertaken. The first social history dealing with the ancestors of the people who today hold *Kumina* as their own, written by Monica Schuler (1980), paints an intriguing picture of a little known chapter in Jamaica's past. Through a juxtaposition of skilful interviews with present-day *Kumina* adherents and her meticulous archival research, Schuler provides us with a window into the historical reality behind *Kumina*. The view she presents leaves little doubt as to the ancestry of either the *Kumina* tradition or the 'Africans' whose lives continue to revolve around it. The evidence points quite clearly to a Central African background and a post-Emancipation origin in Jamaica. Schuler is on strong ground when she surmises that what is today known as *Kumina* developed during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century among 'voluntary' African immigrants who came to work as indentured labourers on the ailing Jamaican sugar estates; nearly all of them were recruited from the population of

'recaptives' or 'Liberated Africans' – former slaves who had been 'liberated' by British anti-slave-trade patrols while en route to the Americas, and subsequently sent to Sierra Leone or St Helena.

In the eastern parishes, especially St Thomas, these agricultural labourers were primarily Central African.<sup>3</sup> Given this, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the present-day Kumina tradition (which is most strongly represented in St Thomas) might, at a number of levels, show the stamp of Central African culture. And indeed, Schuler's work, along with a few other recent studies (Lewis 1977; Brathwaite 1978), attests to the strength and depth of the Central African impact in this area of Jamaica. Particularly prevalent in the Kumina tradition of today is a Kongo element, a cultural thread which runs through its entire fabric. The voices of all the Kumina devotees who speak through the above authors resound with Kongo themes and Kongo concepts – often in the Kongo language itself. We have come a long way indeed since the days when the African reality embodied in Kumina could be summarily dismissed or doubted, as in the following passage:

The Kumina still exists most probably only in one part of Jamaica....The dancers are supposed to be true 'Bongo Men' or Africans ....The Kumina songs are sung in 'Bongo' which the singers say is an African language. They offer translations into Jamaican dialect. They really believe it is African and seem to have a small translatable vocabulary which they can use when they want to be mysterious (Kerr 1952 144–145).

As the work of scholars such as Schuler, Brathwaite and Lewis has made increasingly apparent, Kumina can neither be reduced to a quaint survival nor dismissed as a fantasy of Africa re-enacted. It is a vibrant and fully

living African-based religion. Those who belong to the 'Bongo Nation' and practise Kumina really *do* consider themselves Africans, regardless of what others might wish to believe about them. Their African identity and consciousness are not designed; they are rooted in the still-remembered historical experience of nineteenth-century African immigrants who adapted themselves, and passed the product on to their children and their children's children. The end-result is that there exists today in eastern Jamaica and particularly St Thomas, a social and economic network of 'Africans' – people who belong to a bona fide 'subculture' based on an African-derived religion, ideology and language.

In this paper we hope to add to the suggestive beginnings made by Schuler and others in understanding who the 'African Bongo' people of eastern Jamaica are, and who their ancestors were. One of the authors (Bilby) spent one month in St Thomas parish conducting intensive interviews with Kumina specialists and attending ceremonies in several locations; in addition, during a year of research among the Windward Maroons of eastern Jamaica (a distinct group of Afro-Jamaicans, with their own separate history, ritual language and ceremonial traditions), he made numerous visits as well to Kumina dances in both St Thomas and Portland, and interviewed Kumina practitioners in both parishes.<sup>4</sup> Some of the information gathered during these periods – including oral history, stories, songs and linguistic glosses – is presented and interpreted in this study. The other author (Fu-Kiau), an expert on Kongo culture and a Mukongo himself, has authored several works on the Bakongo and has worked previously on

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Jamaican Kumina, in collaboration with Edward Brathwaite of the University of the West Indies (see Brathwaite 1978).<sup>5</sup> Our goal has been to examine the cultural record contributed to this study by the Kumina people themselves, to see in what ways it might shed new light and lend additional strength to the work which has already been done. We present here our findings, which we believe speak largely for themselves. It is our feeling that they leave little doubt as to the specific African provenience, the historical outlines, or the experiential genuineness and cosmological profoundness of the Kumina religion. What follows is an interpretative account, built upon the memories, reflections and words of Kumina participants themselves, of a New World tradition which remains palpably Kongo in a great many respects. This cultural heritage is shared by a large number of persons spread over an area of several hundred square miles and it permits 'Bongo' strangers upon first meeting to interact and communicate in ways not understood by the 'Jamaica creoles' who live alongside and greatly outnumber them. Facts such as this bear out the claims of these Jamaicans who insist that they belong to a distinguishable 'Bongo Nation.' As we shall see, the 'Bongo Nation' of which they speak is the extension of none other than the Kongo nation to which the majority of their not so distant foreparents belonged.

### The Ancestral Presence

If Kumina possesses a single most important organizing principle, it is the continuity between the ancestral dead and their living progeny. In the earliest serious study of Kumina, this tradition was characterised as

a 'family religion' (Moore 1953, 117).<sup>6</sup> In another article it was noted that 'membership and organisation of African Cumina center around relationships and neighborhoods. The dead as well as the living, are counted in active membership in the religious life of the community' (Simpson 1970). This is indeed the crux. The express purpose of any serious Kumina ceremony, whether it be a memorial, an entombment dance, a birth celebration, or a private working, is to establish contact with the ancestral dead through the possession of living dancers by their spirits. If a Kumina does not succeed in invoking the ancestors and precipitating *Myal*, or spirit possession, it is considered a failure. An essential aspect of Kumina, then, is the link it forges between generations, its maintenance of communication between the living and the dead. This is a matter which has been admirably covered in previous writings, and so we shall not present here a detailed description of this process. Rather, we pose the following question: who *are* the ancestors who live on in Kumina, what are their characteristics, their cultural orientations and identities and their language(s)? And how well are they really remembered? If Kumina is truly an ancestral religion, then it would seem that any understanding of it must hinge upon the continuing dialogue between the living and their deceased ancestors, and what the former have to say about their spiritual interlocutors.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1950s the anthropologist Joseph Moore collected the names of 21 ancestral spirits who were well known among Kumina groups in the Morant Bay area (Moore 1953, 244-249). A few decades later, Monica Schuler (1980) noted the names of a number

of other Kumina ancestors. To these, we would like to add our own list of some of the more frequently mentioned ancestors among members of the 'Bongo Nation' throughout eastern Jamaica. It should be mentioned that every Bongo man or woman upon death enters the world of the ancestors and has the prerogative to come to Kumina and take possession of whatever living dancers he or she may wish; the total number of ancestors who are currently remembered, including the recently deceased, is thus very large and the names of those remembered vary from community to community and individual to individual. Nonetheless, there are a number of older and/or more famous ancestors who seem to be known by Kumina participants spread across a wide area. We limit the following list primarily to such prominent forebears, several of whom are said to have been born in Africa and are vaguely conceptualised as apical ancestors of a sort. As would be expected, a few of these are also mentioned in the accounts of Moore and Schuler.

Manoka Mvula, who lived in Cardiff, behind Leith Hall and is buried at Bath  
 Charles Malaika  
 Old Grove, who lived in Winchester  
 Old John Chopper  
 Old Espeut, who lived in Needham Pen and Stanton; he came from Africa  
 Old Parker, who lived in Dalvey  
 Old Dennison, who came from Africa  
 Old Cook ('Two-Head Zion') who came from Africa  
 Old Dunn, who lived in Arcadia  
 Mother Renny (Charlotte Renny) (Kominchi), who lived in Port Morant and Leith Hall

Mother Sam, who lived in Leith Hall  
 Mantu Kokolo, who came from Africa and lived at Water Valley  
 Bongo Chisholm  
 Mama Murray  
 Old Kenyon  
 Old Wilson, who came from Africa and lived in Needham Pen and Johns Town  
 Nana Davis  
 Maria Miller  
 Old Snate (Snaith?)  
 Old Davis, who came from Africa  
 Old Flemmings, who came from Africa and lived at Stanton Road  
 Tina Espeut (Auntie Tina), who lived at Stanton Road  
 Babu Bryan ('Matthias'), who lived at Prospect  
 Mother Prudie, who lived at Cedar Valley and Somerset  
 Tata Barclay  
 Aloni Scott (Auntie Loni), who came from Africa and lived at Centre York  
 Matthew Kreso, who came from Africa and lived at Centre York  
 John Kreso, who came from Africa  
 Bongo Lipton, who is buried at Petersfield  
 Bongo Wilbert  
 James Grasset, who lived at Danvers Pen and had relatives at Stanton Road  
 Man Minott, who was George Minott's son  
 Old Douglas, who came from Africa  
 Man Parker, who lived in Dalvey and was Old Parker's son  
 Bongo Mel Williams, who lived at Fruitful Vale, Portland  
 Thomas Laing  
 Melda Minott  
 Bongo Minott ('Duppy-Catcher'), who lived at Pera  
 Old Minott (George Minott), who came from

Africa and lived in Arcadia  
 Ma Minott, who lived at Pera  
 Mandumbe

Many of the persons listed here are said to have been among the earliest 'African Bongo' people to come to Jamaica. These older ancestors belonged to a number of 'tribes' (this word is used by present-day Kumina cultists themselves) which are remembered by their descendants today. Kumina specialists spread across St Thomas parish agree on the names of the most important ancestral tribes, and many of the persons who volunteer such information will themselves claim membership in one or another tribe. There are four particular tribes which are almost always named and are considered the most important ones in the 'Bongo Nation.' They are the following:

1. Kongo
2. Muyanji
3. Munchundi
4. Mumbaka<sup>8</sup>

Occasionally, other tribes are added to these four, such as: Mimbundu, Munayandi, Muntwente, Nago and Ibo. There seems to be little doubt in most persons' minds about which is the most influential tribe; it is the Kongo tribe. Many of the 'Africans' in eastern Jamaica proudly claim membership in this tribe. There is a certain prestige attached to the labels 'ring Kongo' or 'ring-born Kongo' ('real' Kongo, or 'true-born' Kongo) and they are applied only to those who come from a long line of Kumina devotees and are very knowledgeable in the Kumina tradition. In fact, the 'Kongo tribe' is sometimes said to encompass all the other tribes and the 'Kongo

Nation' is sometimes held to be synonymous with the 'Bongo Nation' – the entire 'African Nation' which practises Kumina. It is felt that virtually all of the Kumina ancestors are related in some fashion to the Kongo tribe.

The centrality of the Kongo tribe in Kumina tradition is not fortuitous. Of the four most important tribes mentioned above, Kongo is considered by most devotees to be the 'highest' or 'strongest.' The other three names are all derived from either actual sub-groups of the Bakongo or from closely related neighbouring groups. 'Muyanji' refers to the Bayanzi (Kwango and Kwilu) people, 'Munchundi' to the Basundi and 'Mumbaka' to the Anbaka of Angola (see Schuler 1980, 69–71, 148–150). All of these peoples speak either dialects of the Kikongo language or very closely related Bantu languages. It is not at all surprising, then, that the 'African Country' language used by Kumina people, the language of the ancestors, is almost completely Kikongo-derived, as we shall later see.

The primacy of the 'Kongo tribe' in Kumina is also consistent with the historical data on the demography of nineteenth-century African immigration to eastern Jamaica. Monica Schuler (1980, 68–69) has shown that the parish of St Thomas-in-the-East received a particularly high concentration of Central African immigrants during the later nineteenth-century. Some of the many Yoruba immigrants who also entered Jamaica during the same period (most of whom were settled in the western part of the island) ended up in St Thomas as well. It appears, however, that the Yoruba impact on the Kumina tradition is negligible, although many Kumina specialists have memories of Yoruba (Nago) people. It is

admitted that people from the 'Nago tribe' are 'Africans,' but many Kumina people deny that the Nagos belong to the same 'Bongo Nation' which is at the centre of the Kumina tradition. The following comment by a respected older Kumina leader is often echoed by other Kumina participants:

They only talk a little different. You see, them talk funny. I can't talk like them, because them talk funny...Nago. Same African, but them call them Nago, you see. Funny little nation. They talk a little funny. I don't understand them, the way they talk.

(Port Antonio, October 7, 1978)<sup>9</sup>

One Kumina elder indicated that there was once a Nago enclave in Winchester, St Thomas, where a few of his Nago friends lived. One well-known Nago woman living there was called Mama Ledi and there was another respected Nago known as Sammy Beladadi. Another informant mentioned a place in St Thomas called *Tokodo*, which had several Nago residents at one time and which was known as a place with strong spiritual power. There was a particularly notorious Nago Science-man (ritual specialist) living there. It is not unusual, in fact, to find Kumina people who claim partial Yoruba ancestry. Said one Kumina specialist, for instance:

My old man, him have a little tribe of Nago, you know, far down. Because me always have one of my grandmothers, my father's mother ... She always have a song she say is a Nago.

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

Other Kumina participants state that the Nago people in St Thomas have more or less died out. It is said, though, that the Nago people used to have their own songs in their own language and that these were once backed by the same Kumina rhythms played on the same Kumina drums. One such song

is remembered by the man quoted just above, as sung by his grandmother:

*Sheh ... tumaleté, ye ye, tumaleté  
oy-eh, tumaleté, oy-oh, tumaleté*

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

Occasional references to Nago ancestors and songs notwithstanding, it appears that the Yoruba influence on Kumina has been slight. Nearly all of the most important ancestors are said to belong to one or another of the four Central African tribes named above. Like other ancestors, many present-day 'Africans' in eastern Jamaica maintain the concept of tribal affiliation, if not an actual genealogical map behind it. Individuals may assert, for example, that they are descended primarily from the Muyanji or Munchundi tribes. In practice, however, no distinction is made between persons claiming different affiliations; all tribes have been merged into the unitary 'Bongo Nation,' which now possesses a single ceremonial complex, Kumina, and a single ritual language, known as 'Country,' 'African' or 'Kongo language.'

Present-day descendants of the nineteenth-century Central African immigrants continue, in the tradition of their forebears, to set themselves apart – at least in theory – from the Afro-Jamaican majority surrounding them. Jamaicans not descended from the 'Bongo Nation,' as well as those who are descended from it but have 'strayed' and lost contact with the Kumina tradition and ritual language, are commonly referred to as 'Jamaica creole' or 'kriolin' (i.e. creolian).<sup>10</sup> In the 'Country' language, such persons are referred to as 'Mondongo.' It is said that in very serious Kumina ceremonies, during the later hours, 'Mondongo' persons are

not allowed to participate and only 'deep Africans' – those who know the Kumina 'Country' language and traditions well – may dance in the ring. To ensure that 'Mondongo' spectators get the message, the following song, designed specifically for such occasions may be sung:

*tell Mondongo  
fe tan one side  
Mondongo, gyal  
you fe tan one side  
(tell the Mondongo  
to stay aside  
Mondongo, girl  
you must stay aside)*

Interestingly, the word 'Mondongo' itself probably has a Kongo derivation. Schuler (1980: 69-70) points out that Ndongo is the name of a group located in the area north and east of the Zaire River estuary and that members of this group were 'commonly found as strangers in the Kongo Kingdom.' Among Kumina people, the word 'Mondongo' is often defined precisely as 'stranger' – in the sense of one who does not belong to the 'Bongo Nation.' However, an even more likely Kikongo derivation for this term is to be found in the word 'mundongo,' used historically to refer to those Kongo individuals who assisted (often as porters, but sometimes in other capacities as well) the Europeans who were penetrating their country. By extension, the word eventually came to be used to mean 'slave' (see Laman 1936: 609). In Jamaica, the word appears to have been applied by the post-Emancipation Central African immigrants to the black 'creoles' surrounding them, most of whom had only recently been freed from bondage and who

were seen by the Africans as being part of the white/European world.<sup>11</sup>

Those Kumina specialists who do maintain an intimate relationship with the ancestors and possess 'deep' knowledge sometimes refer to themselves as 'creole Bongo' or 'kriobong' and they reserve for the earliest ancestors – those born in Africa – the honorific title, 'salt-water Bongo.'<sup>12</sup>

As one Kumina expert explained:

Any one of them come from yonder, ride  
'pon ship come, them say them a salt-water  
Bongo ... him born over yonder ... in Africa.

(Port Antonio, October 7, 1978)

Several 'salt-water Bongo' people, such as Old Cook, Old Davis, Old Espeut or Old Wilson, are widely remembered. Some of them have anecdotes or little bits of knowledge attached to them.

Old Cook, who is buried in Arcadia, was also known as 'Two-Head Zion' because, it is said, he had two heads – the one on his shoulders and then, growing out of the back of this, another smaller one (he may have had a tumour). Old Cook has his own song, variants of which are known and sung throughout eastern Jamaica. One version goes as follows:

*you seh you da Two-Head Zion  
wah you da call me name fa?*

*(you say you're a Two-Head Zion  
why are you calling my name?)*

Old Snate, another 'salt-water Bongo,' worked on Stanton estate and when his contract expired bought 14 acres of land. He was famous for his spiritual prowess and was particularly adept at making the Kumina drums play by themselves, under the influence of spirits.

Another ancestor from Africa, Mantu Kokolo, was renowned as a great dancer. His talent is recalled in a Kumina song:

*Mantu Kokolo, wind da body la*  
*Mantu Kokolo, wind de body la*  
*A Mantu Kokolo*

(Dumphries, July 18, 1978)

'Mantu Kokolo,' if derived from Kikongo, would be a particularly apt name for one who was captured as a slave and subsequently freed by a British patrol, only to find himself labouring under the harsh conditions facing immigrant contract labourers in nineteenth-century Jamaica; the Kikongo phrase 'muntu-mu-kokolo' translates roughly as 'the person within the yoke.'

A number of other ancestors appear to have been known by Bakongo names. Manoka Mvula, the most famous of all the 'salt-water Bongos,' was apparently a rain-maker, as Schuler (1980: 70) has noted; 'Manoka,' a Kikongo word, refers to pools of rainwater and 'mvula' means 'rain.' Matthew and John *Kreso* bring to mind the word *nkezo*. 'Nkezo' or 'Zakezo' is a common Bakongo name, meaning literally, 'what has been cut' or 'he who has been circumcised' – or, by extension, 'what has been made law.' Charles Malaika's name may be derived from 'malaka,' Kikongo for 'many.' 'Malaka,' or more commonly 'mambu malaka,' is a common Bakongo name which may be given to a newborn baby, with the meaning that the child is coming into a world where many problems will be facing him.<sup>13</sup> Others, who were not born in Africa, also carried Kongo names. Kominchi, whose English name was Charlotte Remy, was a 'creole Bongo,' born in Jamaica. She was a Kumina leader, or

'queen,' and was respected as a great herbal healer. Her métier was acknowledged by others in the community, who fondly called her 'Kominchi'; in Kikongo, 'n'kwa-minti' (literally, 'one who – trees') means 'the one who heals with herbs.'

Not all of the ancestors are remembered like Kominchi for their benevolent service to the community. Some of them are said to have had particularly anti-social dispositions. Mother Prudie, who lived during her later years in Somerset, St Thomas, is remembered as an opportunist who would manipulate spirits toward the most evil ends, so long as she was sufficiently paid by her clients. So great was her reputation as an evil sorceress that Maroons would come down from their villages in the mountains and buy charms from her to be used in hexing enemies in their own communities. When Mother Prudie died, the people in her community disgraced her by burying her standing up, with her coffin in vertical position – a measure intended to ensure that her spirit could neither rest, nor wander freely about to disturb the living.<sup>14</sup> Another greatly feared ancestor was Bongo Lipton, who not only used to participate in Kumina, but was a member of the Convince Cult, an Afro-Christian group in eastern Jamaica.<sup>15</sup> Bongo Lipton is said to have murdered untold numbers of people by sending spirits against them, at the behest of their enemies. It is said that his co-villagers were so concerned about the return of his spirit that they were not content merely to bury him in standing position, but also bound his coffin round with chains. Anecdotes such as these hint at a lively tradition of sorcery and witchcraft accusations which may have operated – in a manner familiar to social

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anthropologists – to channel social tensions within the African immigrant community.

One of the most revered Kumina ancestors, known throughout eastern Jamaica, died not too long ago. His name is Babu Bryan – he is also known as ‘Matthias’ – and his fame is based largely upon his outstanding musicianship. Any time Babu took over the cast (lead drum) at a Kumina ceremony, success was a near certain thing; his playing was so sweet that it would invariably draw throngs of ancestral spirits, who would take possession of living bystanders and after using their bodies to dance and enjoy themselves, would assist the living with their problems. It is said by his many admirers that there has never been another drummer in Jamaica who could match Babu Bryan’s skills. Babu has joined the ranks of the ancestors, as one of the younger spirits, and today occasionally returns to Kumina dances to possess living participants.<sup>16</sup>

Those named above constitute only a small proportion of the ‘Bongo’ ancestors remembered by Kumina devotees today; they are among the more prominent ones. Although they vary in their ‘ages,’ and thus their distance from the living, all of them – including those born in Africa, the ‘salt-water Bongos’ – are viewed as very real persons, not more than a few generations removed from specific, living Kumina practitioners. Details from their lives have been transmitted across the generations and entrusted to a number of their descendants. In the following section, we present a few such memories, learned by present-day Kumina people at the feet of their foreparents, in the hope of achieving a brief glimpse at how things were for the earliest ancestors.

### Memories of Exile<sup>17</sup>

There are still alive in St Thomas parish, persons who claim to be the great-grandchildren of individuals born in Africa. In fact, some even assert that they are the grandchildren of such individuals. One such man spoke of his grandfather, an old African known as Old Minott, who lived to be over one hundred years of age. When Old Minott died his grandson was about eleven years old – old enough to have learned and retained a fair amount. This grandson, a Kumina devotee, volunteered the story of how Old Minott was first captured in Africa:

Him seh plenty of them was taken away... like from boys. Him seh they were taken away from they were boys. When that slavery time, now, when them bring them come here them was boys. Him seh them just...like you da hear them make, like how you hear that music playing, like how that music would be playing there now, and a crowd would hear that and anxious to go and see what making that noise there...I don’t know, it must be someone in town weh them want fe catch them or some must be the English people. Them come with a sound, and when you go up there now, a lorry is there and them just... you can’t go back home. Them just detain you there. You hear sound now and you seh, “bwai, me a walk go so.” And you run go up there. And you go up, you can’t come in back. Him tell me that’s how they come away. That’s how they come away.

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

According to this man, Old Minott was captured around the same time as another famous ‘salt-water Bongo,’ Manoka Mvula. The two of them fell victim to the slave-catchers’ musical lure and, after being ‘rescued’ by British anti-slavery patrols, ended up travelling together to St Thomas in Jamaica:

Him tell me when them take him away, and he came here, him and the same Manoka, they carry him to a place name Hordley, out a (at) Jones place, where you see all those old slavery building there. And him work at Holland works...is after (Queen) Victoria time, after the slavery abolish. Then you see them take a woman and form...you have fe call it, them form them own nation. Them take a woman from here...them call them 'mondongo'...kriolin, that's how them mean. Them call them 'mondongo.'

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)<sup>18</sup>

Old Minott, and others who like him had been assigned to post-Emancipation plantation work, indeed formed their own 'nation' – the 'Bongo nation' – and maintained a distinction between themselves and the 'Jamaica creoles' surrounding them, some of whom they married. The process of adjustment and adaptation to their new surroundings had begun, but there is ample evidence in the oral traditions of their descendants that the process was neither quick nor particularly smooth. The memory of the African homeland remained clear, and the difficult conditions and poor treatment the workers faced on the plantations only served to increase their desire to return.

One St Thomas 'Bongo man' describes the unpleasant reality met by the immigrant labourers, likening their condition to slavery:

They come here to work as slave. Yeah, they come here to work... and them work. Them really work. They condition wasn't nice. They treat them very rough. They told me that. They carry woman too, you know. Woman come...mix. But the woman not to be seen by the man. No. They have a woman gang, man gang, woman gang, man gang. You see wah me mean? And sometime the man them run way, and gone to the woman fe sex. And if they catch you, they take off every clothes off of you, and you have to stay naked. Yeah, they tell me that. If they catch you with the woman, they strip off all you clothes, and you have to work naked! And...

after they catch you, they work you hard, and they treat you bad, them beat you too. Them have – weh them call it? – tambran... tambran whip...them cat o'nine...the men them never want to work. And they hide. So they bring this bird from foreign come a (to) Jamaica to find man. You know wah they call blackbird? They call them siril blackbird. Them pick ticks...pick ticks off of cow backbone. Well, they bring the blackbird them come, that anywhere at all you de (are) now, them find you, these bird find you, you see. Because if you even going through a patch of bush here now, them live all about. You hear them: "chi-chi-du, chi-chi-du, chi-chi-du, chi-chi-du, chi-chi-du!" Them make a sign, and all who a hunt...them is there. Them is there, and them make a sign.

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

All of the Central African descendants interviewed for this study agreed with this man that the treatment received by most of the indentured labourers was, throughout the duration of their 'contracts,' poor. Although many of these immigrants came to Jamaica with the understanding that they would be able to return to Africa as they desired, few – including those who protested against working conditions – were ever given the opportunity.

In the midst of their 'exile,' the African immigrants retained clear memories of the African homeland and passed on to their descendants a glowing vision of what life for them there had once been like. One descendant recalls what some of the 'old Africans' related to him about life in Africa:

They tell me that Africa is a big...wah they call continent. And they told me that if you go to Africa, and you planting food, and after the food come in, you get all potato big so... one potato. (He gestures to show that they grew to between two and three feet in size, each.) Big!...weigh nine pound, 12 pound, one potato. And one plantain seed ... big!... weigh all three pound. They tell me that. And they tell me that the people them is living good. They don't live no erratic way. They

don't live that life. Everybody just in one unity, you know?... They tell me seh Africa... (have) Mumbaka, Munchundi, Munayandi, and Kongo. They wear sack bag shirt, long shirt, long shirt. They are not in pants. They don't know much about pants. They just sew up the two side, and bound the tail go right around, and the sleeve cut short. They cut out the sleeve that your hand can push in, you know? Like you would just go and buy a flour bag, and you bore here so, and bore here, and cut out the neck, and you push in yourself. They get them ration quite all right. They told me that they get ration quite all right. They call it 'madia'.... 'madia'.

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

The longing for Africa among this first generation of immigrants was apparently felt very deeply, if we can judge by the many stories of attempts to return which have come down to the present. As in many other parts of the New World, it is said that some of the more determined African labourers tried – a few succeeding – to fly, under the influence of spiritual powers, back to their countries of origin. Such stories of attempts at airborne escape are ubiquitous among Kumina people today.<sup>19</sup> We offer here a few specific examples:

Me hear seh first-time old people – me no know if is true or not – them fly... from them no eat salt... Listen me good. me hear seh people weh come from... them old African man, weh come from overseas, them fly, for them no eat salt. Well, me no see it... Me only hear.

(York, July 17, 1978)

Them can't go away. And when them come here, them told me that.... them bring a whole heap of shad... mackerel. Them bring a whole heap of salt. And them never eat salt. The African them don't eat salt, you know, no salt at all! The moment you eat salt, your body just lege-lege (lethargic, weak). You can't work... mean that you feeling sick, your body sick. And they give most of them lunch-time salt fe eat. They take salt cook their food. And by hungry, they get them to

eat. And they couldn't go back foreign. Plenty fly gone back home. Who fly, me don't know them. Is one man! Him here to the last, and him was about to fly. Is the man they call George Minott, same man weh me tell you about, name George Minott. And when him hear that everybody a fly a go way, and him eat the salt... him dia (eat) the munga (salt). Him want fe fly. And him climb a coconut tree. And him said, 'good bye, everybody!' And when him do so (gestures as if jumping off), him drop. Him only just drop a (to the) ground. And nothing don't do (was the matter with) him... never get a blow. Him was the baddest man ina the district here. Never get no injury.

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

They were planning – himself (Old Minott, the same George Minott) and Manoka, him tell me that, because they were two friends. Him and Manoka was two friends, you know. Them call them brothers, almost. Same tribe. And when him come here, they plan was to fly back, after a time, because they have some kind of experience how to fly. Well, they (the planters) now know that they had the intention, and them know that things can happen like that. Then, them wash them clothes a (in the) river, and give them salt to eat. One time, Manoka was going to try it. And when them went up on a little piece of... like how you da cut a coconut tree and cut off a piece of it, then the root, not low down... stump of it. And when Manoka went up on it, and talk... you know, because before them fly, before them wing business de come out, them talk language, you know, talk language, talk language. And when Manoka wing almost budge, it not as tall as per usual, and when him da try – is a experiment them a try – him just fall down.... When Manoka talk, him wings come out. And me ask the old man... why him didn't fly back. Him seh when them came here, them tamper them this way: by having them clothes wash at the river, and giving them salt... them call it 'mungwa.' The people here, the slave-masters, give them salt to eat, because in their country them no eat salt food. So that's why they are so scientific. Them no eat salt food and them clothes no wash ina no river, running stream... (rather) at home in a pan.

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

Those Africans who were unable to return to the homeland must eventually have become resigned to their fate; but their yearning for Africa (denoted by the all-embracing creole term, 'Guinea') never really ceased. Many are the songs sung today by Kumina devotees, carried down from the ancestors, which express this wish for 'repatriation,' and the pain stemming from the knowledge that, for most, it was a dream that would never be achieved. Here are examples of a few such songs:

1.

*Wah me da go do, poor me Guinea bird-oh  
wah me da go do, oh me wan go home-eh*

(Port Antonio, August 21, 1978)

2.

*oy-eh, but what a Guinea mama  
seh woy-oh, kalunga, woy-oh  
seh woy-oh, Guinea bird-oh  
oy-oh, but what a Guinea yard-eh*

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

3.

*fallaline-oh, fallaline, me wan go home-oh  
cyaan go home-oh, fallaline, me wan go home-oh  
oh, me wan go home a Africa, oh, me cyaan go  
home-eh*

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

4.

*eh, seven long year when him come ya  
lango de a door  
August mornin-oh, daylight-eh  
daylight-oh, Manoka  
him cyaan go home-oh  
cyaan go home-oh, Babu Bryan, cyaan go  
home-oy  
Ma Minott-oh, mam-eh, me wan go home-oh  
eh, seven long year, daylight, cyaan go home-oh*

(Spring Garden, July 25, 1978)

The first two songs use the metaphor of 'Guinea bird' to express the helplessness of the stranded Africans; 'Guinea hen' or 'Guinea fowl' is the name given in Jamaica to a type of fowl which is incapable of flight. But the metaphor also involves a play on words, for the 'bird' is a 'Guinea bird' – a bird, after all, originally from 'Guinea,' from Africa.<sup>20</sup> The second song also uses the Kikongo word 'kalunga' – which the singer correctly glossed as 'the sea' – to refer to the vast expanse separating the 'Guinea bird' from its 'Guinea yard,' its African homeland. In the third song, the singer refers to himself as a 'fallaline' – a Jamaican creolism meaning a wanderer, or a stranger to an area. In the last song, the singer states that the various old Africans named in the song could not go home to Africa because 'lango' (from Kikongo 'nlangu,' meaning 'water' – i.e., sea-water) was at their door; that is, they were unable to find a way across the thousands of miles of water back to Africa.

Although the longing for Africa has certainly diminished among present-day Kumina descendants and some claim no desire to 'return' to the land of their foreparents, there are indications that the emotional pull of the ancestors' homeland remained as powerful as ever with at least some second- and third-generation 'Bongo' people. Babu Bryan, for instance, was certainly not one of the original 'salt-water Bongos;' he died only a few years ago and his wife was still alive during the 1970s (one of the authors, Bilby, visited her at her home in Leith Hall in 1978). Yet, in the following song, Babu Bryan cries because he knows that he is destined to spend the rest of his days in Jamaica and to die there, rather than in Africa:

*Guinea bird-eh*  
*wan go home a yard*  
*I'm a Guinea bird-eh*  
*run go de, man, go da, mam*  
*I'm a Guinea bird-eh*  
*Babu Bryan a go home a yard-eh*  
*seh him a Guinea man, tambu-ah*  
*Babu Bryan a cry, him a die ya*  
*wai-eh ma, Babu Bryan, Matthias*  
*wai-eh eh, Babu Bryan, Matthias*

(Port Antonio, June 5, 1978)

With the passing of time, the African immigrants accommodated themselves to their new reality, participating in the society of the 'Jamaica creoles' surrounding them, while maintaining their own distinctive subculture. Their separate identity as 'arrivants' – Africans who had come to Jamaica after Emancipation – was to remain strong, even as they became more familiar with the larger creole society and learned how to manoeuvre better within it. Much as the 'Jamaica creoles' had done before them, the African immigrants underwent a process of creolisation, adapting the shared elements from their cultural pasts to their new situation; and in the process, they created a new ethnicity – what has become known as the 'Bongo Nation.' They were becoming Jamaicans, but Jamaicans of a special sort, whose immediate link not only with Africa, but a specific cultural region in Africa, set them apart. The fact that many of the immigrant labourers were unwilling to relinquish their 'Bongo' attributes – their (Central) African culture and worldview – often worked to their individual disadvantage; the creole society looked upon the African component of its past with ambivalence and often with condescension. But there is evidence that, when pushed too far,

the Africans were not without recourse to defensive strategies, and it appears that at times their tactics involved the conscious deployment of the very 'African-ness' which distinguished them.

One of the most commonly recited pieces of oral history among Kumina people today concerns a white planter, called by the Africans 'Landiman,' who, it is said, attempted to have some Africans thrown off the land adjoining his estate, so as to claim it for himself. As the story goes, Landiman complained to the officials that the Africans were constantly causing a disturbance with their incessant drumming and singing, and on these grounds he had a number of Africans, including Manola Mvula, imprisoned at Morant Bay. The greedy planter's scheme was to backfire, but not before the fiasco had been set to song by the persecuted Africans. Their descendants continue to remember both the song and the events associated with it:

Landiman arrest the man. Landiman is a property owner, and him arrest a man, an African man. Him working, and the man trouble something, and him arrest him. And them start to play Kumina now, and seh: "we a go a Morant Bay now, go bail him" ... go take him out of the jail. So them just sing it that way there. They win the case, and Landiman have to leave and sell out the property.

(Whitehall, July 14, 1978)

Well, this man weh them call...the white man...Bush Landiman ... you see?...so, like him (Manoka) a *play* him drum. And them (the Africans) just seh, they amuse them in the district. So, a (is) it that now, them just *try* him...a (at) mundele yandi...(I) mean the station, de a (at the) courthouse. Well, them jail...Manoka...but him no get way? The place weh them min go (had gone) a (was) Old Harbour Bay...you no know Old Harbour Bay? Well, a (it was) there them min go (had gone) fe go play...So them min

take (had taken) them away and carry them go a (to) Morant Bay. So when them a (were going to) get away now, them play the tune and play the drum...

(Spring Garden, July 19, 1978)

...Manoka is a man. And they bring up the old African people and put them in court, and court day, they going to court, and each man carry their drum. And when they go, they put it out the square, and they start to play. And they sing: (he sings):

*oh ... Landiman a lion-oh*  
*come we go da Malan Bay (Morant Bay),*  
*go bail him*  
*Landiman a lion-oh*  
*come we go da Malan Bay, go jeer him*  
*oh, come jeer him-oh, come jeer him-oh*  
*come we go da Malan Bay, go jeer him*

And when the court call up, and them go up, and when they ask them, "What is this?" they seh, "Is my old grandparents' music we playing." And the judge seh, "What?!" Them seh, "Yes, my old grandparents' Country tune we playing. And they prosecute we." And the judge bid the police them not to interfere with the African. (The judge said): "The African is up there and they come from abroad, and come Jamaica and come work slave. And so unu (you) shouldn't carry them come here." And they let them go. The judge let go every man free.

(Arcadia, July 15, 1978)<sup>21</sup>

By the 1860s, some two decades after the first post-Emancipation African immigrants arrived in Jamaica, members of the 'Bongo Nation' were realising that they and the 'Jamaica creoles' around them had a number of interests in common and that these could be translated into concerted social action. While they certainly had not forgotten the African homeland, neither had they allowed the promise of an eventual return to Africa to distract them from the political realities of the present. In 1865, when the corrupt and

oppressive practices of the local government officials in St Thomas led to a large-scale uprising, a large number of Africans threw their support squarely behind the leader of the rebellion, a 'creole' farmer and church deacon named Paul Bogle.<sup>22</sup> Present-day Kumina adherents, such as the one quoted below, state with certainty that their 'Bongo' ancestors were directly involved in the Bogle rebellion and suffered the consequences:

Well, me take my two eye and go down a (to) Morant Bay, back of the court house there, and see how they do my grandparents... Paul Bogle, he was leading the African troops, the same African Kongo, a certain thing that.

(Port Morant, September 16, 1978)

The epic of 1865 continues to stand out in the minds of Kumina people as a crucial event – perhaps because it symbolizes the growing commitment of the African immigrants to improving the quality of life in Jamaica. Although not truly one of the 'Bongo' ancestors, Paul Bogle is remembered fondly by Kumina devotees; and some claim that his spirit occasionally visits Kumina ceremonies, not to possess the living participants, but merely to enjoy the music and offer his support, much as the African ancestors offered him their support in 1865.<sup>23</sup>

We go down there go play it (Kumina), you know... go a (to) the church, at a place them call Stony Gut, at Spring Garden... fe-him (Paul Bogle's) church what he did build. There fe-him church was. Him build a tower at Spring Garden, him have one there, you know. I go to the tower, and I go to the church, go play. I call him, and him come, with the drum, and him stand up, and him look. Him don't ride (possess) anybody. Him come in a peaceful manner. Him never dance, him jus come, in support, him jus come support, you know?... him and him followers. I could see him. And when him come, him don't drink white rum, but him

use it. Yes, him use it, but him don't drink. I recognize him. Is the same man who them a tell you seh a (is at) Morant Bay, a (is) the statute. The statue is only a way little blacker...but the same shape, with a full suit of khaki.

(Whitehall, July 14, 1978)

As the Africans began to move with greater confidence into the Jamaican political arena, so they began to participate in the wider religious life of their communities. Some of the immigrants became enthusiastic Christians, while simultaneously continuing to practise the Kumina religion of their foreparents. One Kumina practitioner interviewed for this study remembered an early adaptation of a Christian song taught to him by the 'older heads.' The song appears to be in the Yoruba language and constitutes one of the few examples of lingering Nago influence in Kumina. The man who offered the song provided an English translation as well. The two versions were given as follows:

<i>ina mi dom feh</i>	<i>I am so glad dat</i>
<i>Jese feh mi</i>	<i>Jesus love me</i>
<i>Jese feh mi</i>	<i>Jesus love me</i>
<i>Jese feh mi</i>	<i>Jesus love me</i>
<i>ina mi dom feh</i>	<i>I am so glad dat</i>
<i>Jese feh mi</i>	<i>Jesus love me</i>
<i>Jese feh mi</i>	<i>Jesus love me</i>
<i>se feh mi</i>	<i>even me</i>

(Spring Garden, July 28, 1978)<sup>24</sup>

Today many Kumina devotees are also practising Christians and, although Kumina remains an essentially non-Christian, African religion – there is little, and only superficial, evidence of syncretism with Christianity – cordial relations are maintained between Kumina groups and neighbouring Christian

revivalists.<sup>25</sup> The two religions share many of the same songs, and some of the same rituals; and occasionally joint meetings are held. But Kumina has never lost its autonomy. It remains the exclusive possession of the 'Bongo Nation,' linking the 'Old Africans' to their descendants and purveying to each new generation the elements of the Kongo tradition which have become central to the definition of 'African Bongo' ethnicity in eastern Jamaica.

To a certain extent, the practice of the Kumina religion itself is responsible for the transmission of the ancestral heritage from one generation to the next. But if we follow the accounts of those who are acknowledged as the most knowledgeable elders, we come to realise that the acquisition of 'Bongo' knowledge is not, and has never been, a completely passive process. Those who are recognised as Kumina specialists have worked hard to achieve their expertise. Likewise, those who have taught them have put much effort behind the enterprise. It is only because the original immigrants and a chosen few among their descendants pursued a deliberate policy of cultural preservation that the knowledge presented in this study has come down to the present. A prominent Kumina elder described the rigorous process of acquiring 'African' knowledge, based on his own experience as a young boy:

When you go, and go at a African man yard, him seh, "young boy!" Him call you "Boy." That time ganja (marijuana) tree high-high all about, you can climb upon it. "Young boy!... ku kwenda e nzo, an panya yam bazu... yeba zumba nlele." Him seh you fe (must) go and make up some fire fe him, and you burn coconut shell, and when you burn it you hollow it.

(Arcadia, July 15, 1970)

Me naa fool (not fooling) you. What me just know, a (it is) them teach me, and me remember. That's right. Me can tell you anything. Me lose night and weeks upon weeks, you know... sometime me sleep same place, me lean over all upon wattle so, and burn coconut shell fe them...you burn it, and when you done, you out them. And when them want them, them going go-go smoke, them make up them hookah...pipe, them call 'hookah'... and they smoke...call it: "nzumba nlele, mbuta mbut, en diamba wan zumba nlele...ku kwende yen panya." "Panya" mean bring the thing, bring the ganja, come make me smoke. And them begin to ...talk now to me. Them mostly talk soso (pure) Country, you know...word. And them begin talk to me now, till you get the understanding. If you no got good brains, you know, after them tell you the word, it just wear out of you. But me question them, man, me question them, ask them wah them call that-that now. Them seh, "then, boy, you no know ntiba?" Me seh, "yes, man." Him seh, "well, the tiba name banana." Me seh, "then, wah them call coconut, sah?" Same like how you ask me. Him seh, "it name kandi." And them tell me, and me seh, "ah...so." Sometime all three, four, five time me ask them back the same question, fe remember.

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

That the Central African immigrants of the nineteenth century so assiduously passed on their cultural heritage to their descendants should come as no surprise. Given the conditions they faced, it is not difficult to understand why they would wish to maintain their orientation toward the African homeland. Although they did not come to the New World as slaves, in the legal sense, there is a good deal of evidence that many of them did not fully understand the sort of labour, nor the living conditions, to which they had committed themselves, until it was too late. Methods of recruitment were often underhanded. The liberated Africans who formed a good part of the labour pool for the West Indies after Emancipation

were wooed by deceptive promises; some were not even given a real choice, but were transferred to New World plantations almost before they knew what had happened to them.<sup>26</sup> But perhaps the worst part of the experience involved the realisation that, for most, there was no turning back. Whereas many of the indentured African immigrants had sailed for Jamaica with every intention of accumulating a small fortune and then returning to their country of origin, the Jamaican situation would soon enough put a damper on their hopes. Thus was the dream of eventual repatriation transformed into a bitter realisation of permanent exile.

For the Kumina elders of today, the cultural heritage bestowed upon them by the ancestors is inextricably bound up with this notion of exile. While the memory grows dim among younger Kumina followers, it continues to haunt older devotees, even in their dreams. One man recounted a nightmare, in which the original recruitment of his ancestors, with a strange ironic twist, was recapitulated in reverse:

Is the truth I'm telling you. This week, Monday weh gone, I in a house there and I eat four (green bananas). And it sick me belly. And whole night I never get a rest. And during the day, me lay down in there...I 'leka nkwan,' mean to seh me sleep. And me dream see a man come up and seh to me seh me must take him red-cover book and give to him, because them give him some present in the old past, in slave business...(those) who would come Jamaica come work slave. And me call to the man, me seh, "listen me..." Me seh, "boy, take the ship!"...since them a give a present, take the ship that would carry him go a Africa, and come back and go back anytime we want go.

(Arcadia, July 15, 1978)

For a man several generations removed from the last ancestral transatlantic crossing,



this may seem a remarkable dream; such, however, is the power of historical consciousness, when nourished on human hopes gone awry.

### The Living Kongo Legacy

In order to give the reader some idea of the extent to which Kongo culture has been maintained by carriers of the Kumina tradition, we present below a series of short discussions, each centring around a particular aspect of this tradition which can be seen to have a specifically Central African parallel. The cultural connections discussed below are by no means exhaustive, but have been singled out for the purposes of this study from a larger pool of data. The reader should bear in mind that the organic whole which is Kumina must be seen as a New World creation and not an exact replicate of any specific African cultural complex; doubtless, a case could also be made for influence from the cultural traditions of the non-Kongo nineteenth-century immigrants who were present, as small minorities, among the indentured African labourers in eastern Jamaica. Nonetheless, when the facts are viewed in combination – as set out below – there remains little room for doubt, we believe, as to the predominance of the Kongo elements in the Kumina tradition.

#### A. A Kongo Story

The following story was narrated by a respected Kumina elder from St Thomas, who was acknowledged by people throughout the parish as one of the best living Kumina drummers in Jamaica:

In the African, my grandfather tell me that the Kongo is the highest. And they are Scientific people. For him used to tell me a story. Him seh there was a little man. When

you go to the market, like you da go to the market on Saturdays...there was a little man. Nobody will see him appear. But he is very small. And he has a *big* basket. And if you go and you buy a pound of cocoa, and you buy two pounds of cocoa, you put one in there. That person buy two pound of yam, him put piece same way. You buy two cho-cho, you put one in there. And him naa talk, him not talking to anybody. And when it work out, when that basket full, you don't see him, when him take it up. And like how you sitting there...when me look round back, you not there...neither the basket. You seh, 'what is the name of that man?' Me seh, 'that man name Tiete Mbinj.'

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

In this story, elements from several Kongo traditions have been conflated. After finishing the story, the narrator explained that 'tiete mbinj' means 'bird,' and that the little man in this story had been given this name because he was so small and because he would usually appear and disappear suddenly, without being seen, 'just like a bird.' Several other Kumina informants also glossed 'tiete mbinj' as 'bird.' In fact, in Kikongo, 'ntietie' – sometimes spelled 'ntyetye' – refers to a particular small bird ('ntyetye mbinza' is a type of very small bird) (See Laman 1936: 805).

Of greater significance, however, is the fact that in Kongo tradition there is a famous mythical figure known as Matete (in some regions known as Masese) who is noted for the large basket (Kikongo, 'ntete') he always carries with him. He is characterised as being small and delicately-built (sometimes he is represented as an 'nsesi,' or gazelle). Among other things, Matete is a trickster, and there are many tales in which he uses his magically-endowed basket to contain and overcome rivals who exceed him in size and physical strength but lack his wile and wisdom. Laman (1968: 122–24), for instance, has recorded a

tale in which Matete (here called Nsesi) wins a bride by capturing with his basket a number of animals larger than himself and thereby satisfying her father as to his worth.<sup>27</sup>

At a more general level, the mythical spirit of Matete serves as a sort of guardian and enforcer of moral principles, protecting the well-being of the community. As they grow up, children are warned that they must behave properly, for they cannot know when the spirit of Ntete Matete (literally, 'Matete's basket') is watching them. (Matete is sometimes invisible, and it is said that he does not walk or fly; as in the Jamaican story quoted above, it is said in the Kongo tradition that nobody knows how he gets where he goes.) It is well known that the spirit of Matete frequents marketplaces and other public gathering places, basket in hand, waiting to find wrong-doers. In his basket he carries all kinds of things, including diseases and other misfortunes, which he will sometimes bestow upon those who have violated community norms. He also accepts gifts from those who are inclined to give and thus symbolises the spirit of reciprocity which is so important in maintaining community solidarity.

The name of the character in the Jamaican story – 'Tiete Mbinj' – suggests yet another important connection. *Tata Mbenza* is the praise name among the Bakongo of the Kimbenza clan, which is still used today to recall Ne-Mbenza (the Lord Mbenza), believed to be the founder of this Kongo clan. This praise name is used by people of Kimbenza descent to introduce themselves when they are out travelling.

It would seem then, that the 'Tiete Mbinj' of the Kumina people in Jamaica represents a fusion of three overlapping Kongo concepts:

1) the *N'tete-a-Kimbenza* (synonym, *Nkutu-a-Kimbenza*), the communal basket/sack of the Kimbenza clan, which symbolises the providing of the collectivity with its basic needs (each Kongo clan has such a *n'tete-a-kanda* or *nkutu-a-kanda*; 2) *Tata Mbenza*, the praise name of the Kimbenza clan, used to recall its founder *Ne-Mbenza*; and 3) Matete, or Masese, the mythical hero of Kongo tradition, whose magical basket is conceptually linked with the communal baskets or sacks possessed by Kongo clans, mentioned above. (The Jamaican name, 'Tiete Mbinj,' may itself represent a fusion of the Kikongo words 'ntietie,' (kind of) 'bird,' and 'ntete,' 'basket.')

Not only did the Kongo figure Matete make the voyage to the New World, but so did his basket and, apparently, the duties that went with it.<sup>28</sup>

## B. Handling the Dead

According to older representatives, members of the 'Bongo Nation' used to prepare their dead, prior to burial, in a special manner. Knowledgeable specialists were responsible for wrapping the cadaver with a length of cloth known as a 'kandal' (one man stated that another word for this cloth is 'makutu ku'). The cloth was passed around the corpse in such a way that it would plug up all the orifices, thus preventing spiritually-harmful gases from escaping and injuring the living relatives who were responsible for the proper care of the body before burial. The significance of the kandal, however, went beyond this. A few of the specialists interviewed for this study confided that the process of wrapping the body with the kandal is essential to the preparation of the deceased person's spirit for its proper departure from

the domain of the living. As one man put it, 'if you don't have on your kandal, you can't face your father (i.e., God), so you must have fe tan (stay) when you dead.' A brief description of the process of preparing the dead, in the words of specialists themselves, is offered below:

Makutu ku...makutu tu...a (it is) dead kandal, man...makutu ku... kandal mean...what wrap dead. You see, it from ancient days... them use it and wrap dead...because is the rule for it. You can't just lef one dead so. You understand, is the rule.

(Spring Garden, August 5, 1978)

You ever see [them] make up a dead? Well, them put a piece of string right round your waist, and tie it good, tie it way it can't pull ...You pass it right underneath, from the back to the front...You call it "make-up." You make up the person. Me usual to look after sick dead people, you know. Me make up 149 dead sumadi (persons) already...149 me look about...same African. Anywhere at all, me go all a Kingston, go go make up man, bring them come back ina this same district...They seh when this world end, you can't go before your master naked. You use that (kandal) tie up. You are not to go before him naked...Jehovah God, Nzambi.

(Arcadia, July 20, 1978)

Traditionally, the preparation of the dead in the Kongo involved a series of elaborate ceremonies. The amount of effort put into these ceremonies varied according to the wealth and status of the deceased, but all except the insane or the despised were accorded certain basic treatment. The body was first laid out, to be viewed by community members ('kandalala' means, among other things, to be 'completely dead' and laid out for display), and then 'mummification' was begun. This involved a long process in which the corpse was smoked until completely dry. Following this, the body was wrapped in its

shroud; if the deceased were very wealthy, then he would be bundled in many layers of coloured cloth (traditionally made from raffia). (In some regions of the Kongo, 'kandalala' also refers to a very long measure of cloth, the length of outstretched arms.)

Finally, there would be a large ceremonial dance, where the shrouded body was put on display for the last time, followed by burial.

Laman provides a detailed description of the process of shrouding the dead, a segment of which follows:

If the deceased is one of "Nzambi's poor", who has not been able to acquire any possessions, he is shrouded in a papyrus mat, which is wound about head and feet before the body is lowered into the grave... The shrouding of the corpse is more or less according to the fortune of the deceased and his kanda [clan]...An honoured and rich person is shrouded in a number of cloths and blankets and a great feast with dancing, beating of drums and music is held... When the corpse is to be shrouded a palm-rib is first placed nearest the deceased, and then all the cloths and blankets intended for the purpose are wound about the body...Finally they must sew together some of the cloths or else tie everything up with cords and rope. Several hundred pieces of cloth may sometimes be used. That a body is shrouded with so much cloth is due to the desire to show that the deceased and his kanda have been very rich. Further, the cloth he takes with him into the grave is supposed to show those who dwell in the realm of the dead that the deceased is very rich, so that they, too, may honour him (Laman 1957: 89-90).

The intended African immigrants of the nineteenth century, though belonging to the ranks of 'Nzambi's poor,' apparently did not neglect the needs of their dead. For some of their descendants still insist that wrapping with the kandal, or makutu ku (in Kikongo, 'kutu' means a shrouded corpse), is essential to the proper departure of the dead to the world of the ancestors, the realm of Nzambi.

### C. The Colours of Death and Rebirth

During the early 1950s, the anthropologist Joseph Moore wrote of Kumina dances in the Morant Bay area of St Thomas Parish:

Probably as high as 75 per cent of all the larger dances are Memorial dances, sponsored by a family for one or more of its deceased members; these are the dances, sometimes called "black and white dance," which are always held in the evening and attended by large numbers of people, some of them travelling considerable distances to attend (Moore 1953: 148).

Kumina devotees still use the term 'black and white dance' to refer to such memorial dances; these ceremonies are sometimes alternatively referred to as 'mourning dances.' It is said that if a proper memorial ceremony is not held for a deceased Kumina practitioner, then sickness may befall a member of his or her family as a result. Nowadays, since there is increasing slackness about observing the proper memorials, 'black and white dances' have become associated specifically with the amelioration of problems (such as illness) which have resulted from the neglect of the ancestral dead by their descendants:

Black and white...that is mourning. That mean to seh, well, the person, you have to look after him the right way, or else him will die.

(Whitehall, July 14, 1978)

The black and white, now, is your flag when you make a dance, like how them make a dance with that woman, a black and white. She's a sick woman. Black and white mean seh all the family is in mourning. So is beg them begging. Them is in mourning. And when the duppy (ancestral spirit) come, him see seh a mourning them depan (are engaged in)...so them a beg.

(Prospect, July 19, 1978)

The 'black and white dance' gets its name from the colours which symbolise its purpose. At any such ceremony, one will see these colours displayed in a number of ways: in the clothing of the primary participants, as cloth streamers wrapped around the rafters of the Kumina 'booth' (temporary ceremonial structure, made of bamboo), in the mixture of black and white candles held by dancers in the ring; and, as indicated by the Kumina specialist in the above passage, such ceremonies are usually not without a black and white 'flag,' which is posted near the dancing area as the central emblem of the dance's meaning. (It should be mentioned that the word 'mourning,' as used by Kumina people, is not quite the equivalent of the standard English term; in Kumina, the word is not associated purely with sorrow, but signifies also the joy and sense of celebration which are part of any dance memorialising the departure of the deceased to the realm of the ancestors.)

In Kongo tradition, most ceremonies – and particularly funerals and other death ceremonies – involve the ritual use of the colours black and white. Very commonly, for instance, the women who are closely related to the deceased wrap bands of white cloth around their heads for such ceremonies and, at the same time, in counter position to this, smear their faces with charcoal. Sometimes white chalk and charcoal are both applied to the face and body. These two colours symbolise the polarities of life and death. Blackness symbolises birth and life; whiteness symbolises death, and 'rebirth' among the ancestors. The two polar symbols create a cyclical unity, for it is hoped that the departed will eventually return, much-enriched, from

the lower world of the ancestors, to offer the ancestral wisdom he will have accumulated there to the community of the living once more. The colour white also symbolises his eventual re-entry to the physical world. As in Kumina, this cyclical cosmological process is sometimes also symbolised by black and white flags, usually paraded in the environs of a memorial ceremony by children of the village who are not of the deceased's matriline.

#### **D. Ritual Proscriptions**

We return here to the theme of flying back to Africa, as described by Kumina descendants in the last section. The reader may recall that two prominent indentured African immigrants of the nineteenth century, George Minott and Manoka Mvula – as well as others – are said to have attempted flying back to the African homeland by means of spiritual powers. Although it is said that several 'old Africans' succeeded in making this journey, George Minott and Manoka Mvula were among those who failed, and thus they were forced to spend the rest of their lives in Jamaica. The reason given for their failure was that they had consumed 'too much salt' while in Jamaica and, according to one informant, they had allowed their clothes to be washed in a river.

Let us examine the significance of salt first. Stories like this one, about flying and salt, are found in Afro-American communities throughout the New World. Although their origins may lie in the religious traditions of several West African and Central African cultures, the parallels with Kongo beliefs are clear enough and, given our knowledge of the historical connections, it would seem fair to

consider the Kongo tradition as having special significance in the case of Jamaican Kumina.

In Kongo cosmology, it is believed that the ancestral dead, from whom the living derive their spiritual powers, do not eat salt. Salt repels the spirits of the dead and thus causes weakness in the living – particularly those who are engaged in spiritual matters. When people are undergoing initiations of any sort, preparing for war, or participating in a ceremonial dance, they are supposed to avoid salt, so as to build up strength. But more to the point, the Kongo ritual specialist, or *nganga*, is subject to special ritual proscriptions regarding the consumption of salt. Since he is in constant contact with the ancestors, the *nganga* must observe this taboo regularly. For the *nganga*, the expression 'to eat salt' means to mix with ordinary people – those who have not been trained in his specialised area – and to use the language of ordinary people. It is tantamount to straying from the proper use of 'kinganga,' the secret esoteric languages. 'To eat salt,' then, is to lose one's power. If the *nganga* is rash enough to violate this taboo, then he destroys his power as an initiated man, and loses his way of feeling, seeing, and making decisions as a *nganga*.

In eating the salted fish which was supplied them on the plantations, the African immigrants in Jamaica unintentionally diminished their powers. Manoka Mvula, who was characterised by one Kumina specialist as a 'gangga nkisi yakala' – a male ritual specialist (Kikongo, 'nganga nkisi a yakala') – is a good example of one who lost touch with the esoteric language of the *nganga* and thus also the powers associated with it. The reader may recall that Manola Mvula, according to the storyteller on an earlier page, tried to

sprout his 'wings' by 'talking language' – the language of the nganga. However, because he had 'eaten salt,' it was now too late; the power of the language had already left him. Thus, his fate as one stranded in exile was sealed.

Manoka Mvula's failure to fly back is attributed by some Kumina specialists not only to his consumption of salt, but to the fact that his clothes were routinely washed in a river after he had arrived in Jamaica. We can shed light on this statement by noting that among the Bakongo there is a particular kind of ritual specialist, the *nganga matompa*, who is required by tradition to go for long periods without washing his clothes; it is not uncommon for such a nganga to keep the same clothes on for a full year without allowing them to be washed. The observance of this proscription against washing his clothes is essential to the proper maintenance of the nganga's spiritual powers. Interestingly enough, the special expertise of the *nganga matompa* – the particular kind of ritual specialist required to observe this clothes-washing taboo – is the making of rain. Manoka Mvula, whose very name translates roughly as 'one who makes rain,' appears in the oral traditions of his descendants, then, as such a *nganga matompa*.

### E. Invisible Musicians

One of the great mystical feats of the 'old Africans' involved their ability to make the Kumina drums play all by themselves, under the influence of spiritual powers. Nearly every Kumina devotee interviewed for this study mentioned this aspect of Kumina ceremonies; many individuals claimed to have been eyewitnesses to such bewildering events and a few stated that there are still

two or three living Kumina experts who are capable of performing this feat. Typically, such performances took place late at night, when a ceremony had become 'ripe.' The master of the Kumina ceremony would clear the players from the drum and, while the crowd looked on, would cover both drums completely with sheets. After he had chanted in 'Country' ('Kongo language') for several minutes, the drums would begin to play Kumina rhythms at full volume, while still under the sheets. No player could be seen, nor could one have possibly fit (informants insisted), under the sheets. One Kumina practitioner, himself an excellent drummer, gave the following description:

I see our drum, the African drum, play without man sit down 'pon it... Me see it! I see it...two frog...frog. You know frog? Well, two frog play it...a spirit...a fe-spirit form they put there. Man inform it, inform business... the African. And him put down the drum there and cover it with white sheet. And they speak words, them speak them word... invoke! A invoke business. And they cover off the drum. And one man, or two man, or three man, or four man, or five man, going to sing a sing. And them start them tune wah them a sing. And the drum them a play like hell...loud too!

(Arcadia, July 15, 1978)

Several other individuals claimed, like this man, that during such performances the drums were really played by spirits which had come to the Kumina in the physical form of a frog. One man who expressed this same point added that this type of feat is called 'sala bilongo' (which he later glossed as 'working obeah').

Similar ceremonial performances are common in the Kongo, where they are used by master drummers to show the community that they are experts in the art of drumming

and have undergone the proper training and initiation. At such times, drummers may cover themselves with a white sheet before beginning to play, claiming that in the next few moments they will produce an animal from inside the drum (most commonly, a snake). If their drumming is up to the standards of a *nganga* (specialist), then the animal that was named should come crawling from the open end of the drum, while the player continues performing under the sheet. The very best drummers are said to be able to cover the drums and make them sound by themselves, through spiritual influence. In such cases, it is understood that the power controlling the drums originates from an ancestral spirit belonging to the drummer's clan. Sometimes, it is said, this spirit will manifest itself in the form of an animal, such as a snake which crawls around in the vicinity of the drums until it is ready to return to the world of the ancestors.

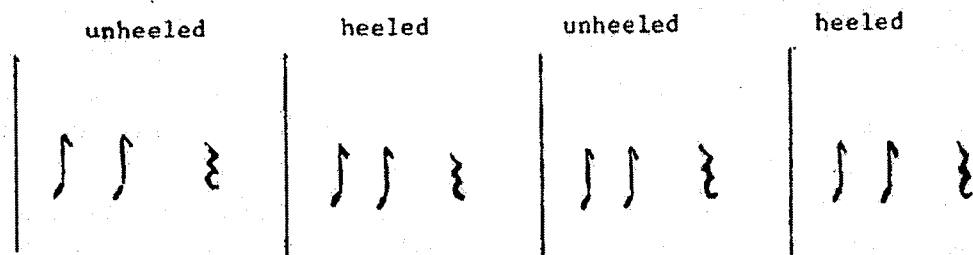
### F. Music of the Ancestors

There has been a good deal of conjecture about the origin of the word 'Kumina,' but little consensus has emerged. Different scholars have traced it to various regions and various languages in Africa; none, however, have suggested a Kikongo origin.<sup>29</sup> This is somewhat surprising, since there is a well-known traditional dance music in the Kongo region known as *Kumunu*.<sup>30</sup> While the dance which actually accompanies this kind of music is called *Madinga*, the drumming style itself is known as *Kumunu*. *Kumunu* drumming is found in many different contexts, such as: during harvest ceremonies; at marketplaces; or in marriage ceremonies, during the later hours. It is also an integral part of the tradition

known as *Wubi* – a type of private feast where specially-invited members of two different villages meet in the bush to discuss inter-village affairs, or to make plans outside the range of public scrutiny.

The *Kumunu* drumming style very closely parallels Jamaican *Kumina* drumming.<sup>31</sup> In the *Kumunu* tradition of the Kongo, two different drums are used, the smaller one called 'mwana' or 'ntambu,' and the larger known as 'ngudi.' In Jamaican *Kumina*, two drums are also usually used, the smaller called the 'playing cast,' and the larger called 'kibandu,' or simply 'bandu.'

There are important differences, in that the Kongo *Kumunu* drums are shallow, square frame drums, whereas the Jamaican *Kumina* drums are cylindrical and much deeper; and in Kongo *Kumunu* the larger drum (*ngudi*) serves as the leading instrument, in contrast to Jamaican *Kumina*, where the opposite holds true, the smaller drum (*playing cast*) acting as the lead. Nonetheless, in both traditions the drums are played by being 'mounted' – the players sit down upon the drums, which are turned over their sides (in the case of *Kumunu*, the drums are rested directly under the legs while the players sit in a chair). And in both *Kumunu* and *Kumina*, the players press their heels against the skin of the drum in such a way as to alter its pitch. Most importantly, the actual rhythmic underpinnings of the two styles are remarkably similar. The *mwana* or *ntambu* of Kongo *Kumunu* and the *bandu* of Jamaican *Kumina* – both functioning in a similar manner as supporting drums – always play the same basic pattern (with the pitch altered by heel on every other group of two beats):



Woven on top of this are the complex patterns of the ngudi in Kongo Kumunu or the playing cast in Jamaican Kumina. Stylistically, the lead parts in both traditions are remarkably alike, and the over-all effect is very similar. For the Mukongo individual who is familiar with Kumunu drumming, the relationship between it and Jamaican Kumina drumming becomes immediately apparent upon first hearing of the Jamaican style. To the untrained ear, the two styles of drumming sound nearly indistinguishable. To the trained ear, they sound unmistakably like close relatives.

In the Kongo region, Kumunu drumming is considered to be one of the lighter styles, and is used primarily for entertainment. The heavier styles associated with more serious ceremonies, such as funerals or memorials, are played on different kinds of drums, the most important of which is the *ngoma*: a long cylindrical drum which is played while held between the legs in standing position. It appears that the indentured African immigrants in Jamaica adopted and modified Kumunu drumming as their central style, and after shifting to a different (cylindrical) type of drum, applied it to their more serious ceremonies, such as 'black and white,' while keeping it for their light entertainment as well. Members of the Jamaican 'Bongo Nation' continue to refer to the Kumina drums, in the language of the ancestors, as *ngoma*. And

at least one important stylistic feature has been transferred from Central African *ngoma* styles to Jamaican Kumina: in Kumina, two wooden sticks, known as *kata*, are often beaten on the sides and back of the drum by a separate player. In the Kongo region, two similar sticks, called *minsangwa*, play a major role in *ngoma* traditions (though they are not used in Kumunu).

The Kumunu style of drumming, though found throughout the Kongo region, is especially common in Kinkenge, in the Manianga area. This area is famous for this sort of music and dance, and it is heard in certain markets there almost non-stop. This association with public markets would not appear at all foreign to the 'Bongo' people of eastern Jamaica, who are often invited to play Kumina in the markets of St Thomas and Portland on Saturdays and are particularly noted for their participation in the celebrated annual gambling event known as 'Coney Island.'

### G. Country Songs

The tenor of the Central African experience in Jamaica can perhaps best be glimpsed, and felt, in the songs of Kumina. The 'deepest,' most powerful songs – and perhaps the most beautiful and plaintive – are those known as 'Country.' The term 'Country' is used by Kumina people to mean the language of the ancestors; in its musical sense it refers to the



category of songs which are composed in this language. Kumina Country songs must be heard to be fully appreciated, for they tap a whole aesthetic realm which cannot be adequately conveyed by the printed page.<sup>32</sup> Many of the singers who have preserved these songs make use of a style of delivery, a vocal timbre, and a melodic sense which are wholly Kongo in quality. But beyond this, the language of most of these songs is unambiguously Kikongo and most of it quite pure, at that. Although there have been slight linguistic changes here and there, most of these songs have preserved the language of the ancestors so well that they are largely intelligible to native Kikongo speakers upon first hearing – even though the singers themselves are able to provide only sketchy accounts of their meanings. It is thus possible to offer translations of some of these songs, which may help to communicate something of their poetic content, as well as their cosmological and experiential depth.

The following selection of songs has been translated by one of the authors (Fu-Kiau), himself a Mukongo. The translations are free, though nearly literal. Each song is presented first in its original form (Kumina Country/Kikongo) and then in translation. Where significant linguistic change has occurred and the text has been brought into line with 'correct' Kikongo, the original form, as sung by the Kumina performer, is included in brackets alongside whatever changes have been made. (Parentheses around letters indicate words or parts of words which were missing from the original Jamaican texts, but are necessary in order to render the texts in correct Kikongo.)

I. o Makinini  
sik'e  
wan'landa, yandi  
yayambula nkondo  
kumeka mono munlembe<sup>a</sup>  
bangiadi ku lweka  
seke – seke-seke yandi  
seke wankundi mamb'e  
badi bandombe  
ku lweka babasasa [bamusasa]  
ban'landi ndumba  
o – matuwidi  
sik'e  
wankundi mambe  
yambula nkondo  
kumeka mono munlembe  
bangiadi luyala  
eh – baleke ba Musasa  
ban'landi ndumba

(Arcadia, July 15, 1978)

o Makinini  
play the drum  
to follow him  
so that I give up the hunt  
to become a community follower  
and leave the authorities aside  
seke – seke-seke warm him  
warmth is a friend of people  
in the cold<sup>b</sup>  
they are black  
away, they are tortured  
they followed girls  
o – we heard this  
play the drum  
a friend of people in the cold  
you, give up the hunt  
to become a community fighter  
now, authorities, govern  
eh – followers of Musasa  
they followed girls

II. banyaku banyaku banyaku bele [wele]<sup>c</sup>  
 sika kumu [kuma siko]  
 bayaku (ba) yaku konde  
 oh – nama  
 beti balulu  
 mu [ku] yaku bele [wele]  
 sika kumu [kuma siko]  
 bayaku (ba) yaku bele [wele]  
 (Arcadia, July 15, 1978)

your colleagues, your colleagues,  
 your colleagues have just gone  
 play the rhythm  
 your colleagues,  
 your colleagues went hunting  
 oh – follow  
 those who are being raised  
 your colleague has gone  
 play the rhythm  
 your colleagues, your colleagues have  
 just gone

III. eh – keh  
 ekiese kiena mu mbundu  
 kinanga yay'e  
 e – se –  
 e mimbombo [mimbamba] tufwa mbe  
 ekiese kiena mu fwa dia [di] bantu  
 kuna yand'e  
 Old Pera, 'Cadia, Kondalville  
 ekiese kiena mu fwa dia [di] bantu  
 kuna yand'e  
 eh – Ma Minott from Pera  
 ekiese kiena mu fwa dia [di] bantu  
 ngana yay'e  
 (mi) tala mu meso  
 tala yandi  
 wa Nzambi Ampungu  
 zebi  
 zebi yandi  
 mu mambu (ma) n'nwa andi  
 ngina tala yandi

tala mu meso  
 (ku) tala yandi  
 tu ayeto [ye] ayeto kwand'e  
 ekiese kiena mu fwa dia [di] bantu  
 kuna yand'e  
 (Spring Garden, July 19, 1978)

eh – keh  
 the memory is joyful<sup>d</sup>  
 o slavery, mother!  
 o father  
 aren't we dying the death of  
 mimbombo<sup>e</sup>  
 the memory of the people is joyful<sup>f</sup>  
 among the ancestors  
 Old Pera, Arcadia, Kondalville  
 the memory of the people is joyful  
 among the ancestors  
 eh – Ma Minott from Pera  
 the memory of the people is joyful  
 the story, mother<sup>g</sup>  
 look with your eyes  
 look at him  
 the Almighty God  
 who knows  
 He who knows  
 by the words of His mouth  
 I will look at Him  
 to look with my eyes  
 to look at him  
 we are alone among ourselves  
 the memory of the people is joyful  
 among the ancestors<sup>h</sup>

IV. CH: nki balongo  
 n'dimba kwenda  
 nki ba'  
 nik'e  
 CH: nki balongo  
 nki bilongwa [bilangwanga]  
 gyal, weh you name  
 mama

CH: nki balongo  
 musele seh (n)gyala  
 Ya Manok'e  
 CH: oh nki balongo  
 Ma Minott-oh  
 sos from Pera  
 CH: nki balongo  
 o 'Cadia-oh  
 crossroad way  
 CH: nki balongo  
 from 'Cadia-oh  
 cross a way  
 CH: seh nki balongo  
 mbuta wayenda [bawenda]  
 kuna Mbamba  
 CH: nki balongo  
 e Nsunga  
 wayende  
 CH: s'eti vo  
 nki balongo  
 nana (n)gyal  
 wayend'e  
 CH: nki balongo  
 Bongo Eustace-oh  
 wayend'e  
 Old Kenyon  
 wayend'e  
 e Mimba  
 wayend'e  
 CH: o nki baloti'e [baloche]  
 mbuta, bangial'e  
 wayend'e  
 CH: nki baloti'e  
 yakala n'wa wantaba  
 sosa yandi  
 CH: nki balongo  
 n'kanda ngung'e  
 wayend'e  
 be kwa bo  
 (Spring Garden, July 19, 1978)

CH: what did they learn?  
 going to the valley<sup>i</sup>  
 what did they learn?  
 what?  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 what are they learning?  
 girl, what is your name?  
 mama  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 my love charm, girl<sup>j</sup>  
 Ya Manoka<sup>k</sup>  
 CH: oh what did they learn?  
 Ma Minott  
 from Pera  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 oh Arcadia  
 crossroad way  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 from Arcadia  
 across the way  
 CH: I say what did they learn?  
 the elder went  
 to Mbamba<sup>l</sup>  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 oh Nsunga  
 went  
 CH: ask yourself this  
 what did they learn?  
 Nana girl  
 you went  
 CH: what did they learn?  
 Bongo Eustace  
 went  
 Old Kenyon  
 went  
 Oh Nimba  
 went  
 CH: oh what did they dream?  
 the elder, governed by them

went

CH: what did they dream?  
the elder, governed by them

went

CH: what did they dream?  
the man's mouth is to be heeded  
seeking him

CH: what did they learn?  
the skin of the bell<sup>m</sup>

went

stop<sup>n</sup>

V. zee -

(ma) sebele Ya Zazi'e  
kuzebil 'andi e  
kukwela wanda  
yandi e  
tala mu meso  
(ka) tala mu mambu ko  
a kuna yandi  
tu yeto ayeto mpangi e  
e - yeto ayeto -  
e tala mu meso  
ayeto ayeto yandi  
kuna yandi  
kukwela wenda  
yandi  
mu tala mu meso  
fwa i nganga yandi  
Nzambi yandi  
zebeze'<sup>o</sup>  
kukwele wendi  
(b)ankwa-mbi  
sek'e, bila yandi  
e Yeti  
mpangi a mono  
mpangi ako  
kukwele ko wenda

a wenda yandi

tala ntala

o kanga boke

kanga boke

se bokeke kwa' boke

(Spring Garden, July 19, 1978)

zee -

it is inconceivably great, Ya Zazi<sup>p</sup>

do not delay<sup>a</sup>

in marrying

(you see) Him

look with your eyes

do not consider words

ah, to Him

we all are brothers

among ourselves

look with your eyes

among ourselves (with) Him

to Him

in marrying

(you see) Him

look with your eyes

in death He is the nganga<sup>r</sup>

He is God

be calm

in marrying

the wrongdoers

their sleeping, He is the cause<sup>s</sup>

o Yeti<sup>t</sup>

brother of mine

your brother

only to marry

go with Him

I am looking

oh tie the package<sup>a</sup>

tie the package

little by little, only the package

### Language of the Descendants

Before presenting the 'Kumina Lexicon' which follows, a few contextualising words are necessary. The first thing to be emphasised is that the Kumina 'Country' words listed below, with glosses, are not isolated survivals. Most of them are widely known in eastern Jamaica, among Kumina devotees, who sometimes use them in prosaic conversational contexts, at other times in ceremonial contexts. In other words, these lexical items are very much *alive* among the network of Kumina people who use them, although they do not constitute, by themselves, what could be called a complete, functioning language. They continue to exist as part of the continuing creolisation process in this part of the island.<sup>33</sup>

This paper is not the place for a detailed linguistic analysis (the authors in any case not being trained linguists), but perhaps a few examples of how these lexical items are sometimes used will help to clarify our point. The following sentences have been transcribed from tape recordings:

1. Yakala kyaan wiilangga, tuba funi wiilangga.<sup>34</sup>  
(‘If man can’t hear [i.e., with his ears], he will hear with his ass.’)
2. Kento mambu tu Zambi, tala him nowa tu di langgu.  
(‘The woman prays to God, she talks with her mouth to the water.’)
3. Bonggo no leka yu wele.  
(‘You have no money’; literally, ‘money does not lie in your pocket.’)
4. Di gyal dem kyaan lamba mabuba fi dia.  
(‘The girls can’t cook breadfruit to eat.’)

5. Mi vumu mjala ... mi lamba, mi dia.  
(‘I’m hungry ... I cook, I eat’; literally, ‘my belly is hungry ... I cook, I eat.’)
6. Kwenda kuma ntiki go sumba diamba.  
(‘Go to the woods and smoke some ganja [marijuana].’)

It is obvious from these few examples that what is being spoken here is not ‘pure’ Kikongo, but rather, a form of Jamaican Creole making use of Kikongo (or other Bantu) lexical items.<sup>35</sup> These items have been ‘pidginised,’ in that they are generally not inflected, and in some cases have undergone morphological and semantic changes. Moreover, they have been ‘plugged into’ a pre-existing creole syntactic structure; and in each case they occur alongside Jamaican Creole lexical items. In the first example, we find JC (Jamaican Creole) ‘kyaan,’ (SE [standard English] ‘can’t’). The second example has JC ‘tu’ (SE ‘to’), JC ‘him’ (SE ‘her’) and JC ‘tu di’ (SE ‘to the’). Number 3 has JC ‘no’ (SE ‘doesn’t’) and JC ‘yu’ (SE ‘your’). In number 4, we see JC ‘di gyal dem’ (SE ‘the girls’), JC ‘kyaan’ (SE ‘can’t’) and JC ‘fi’ + infinitive (SE ‘to’ + infinitive). Number 5 shows JC ‘mi’ (SE ‘my’) and JC ‘mi’ (SE ‘I’). Finally, in number 6 we have JC ‘go’ (SE ‘go’).<sup>36</sup> These sentence examples have been randomly selected and are representative of the way in which ‘Country’ words are commonly used in practice. (It should be emphasised, however, that in ritual oration during ceremonial contexts, and in songs, the ‘Country language’ often occurs in a less ‘creolised’ form, with few or no English-derived lexical items.)

One more important aspect of the ‘African language’ used among Kumina people

deserves mention here. The Kumina lexicon presently in use might appear to be very limited (although the word-list which follows should by no means be seen as exhaustive), but Kumina devotees have developed ways of getting around the limitations. In practice, when using this 'Country language,'

they indulge in a good deal of word-play, combining basic lexical items in such a way as to create compounds with new meanings, thus enriching their 'African' vocabulary. We offer below but a few examples of compound words derived from this process, along with their English glosses:

<b>Jamaican Kumina</b>	<b>'Country' Component Words</b>	<b>English Gloss</b>
ntni-kinzu	nini, 'to drink'; kinzu, 'pot'	glass, cup
kungga-nzo	kungga, 'to dance'; nzo, 'house'	ceremonial house
tuvi-nzo	tuvi, 'shit'; nzo, 'house'	privy
mona-malu	mona, 'small'; malu, 'foot'	hand
kalungga-biizi	kalungga, 'the sea'; biizi, 'meat'	fish
nawa-sanji	nawa, 'mouth'; sanji, 'hair'	beard
malu-kut	malu, 'foot'; kut, 'cloth, clothes'	boot, shoe
lamba-nzo	lamba, 'to cook'; nzo, 'house'	kitchen, cook-house
kiniumba-matoto	kiniumba, 'spirit'; matoto, 'ground'	grave
nvumu-chud	nvumu, 'belly'; chud, 'stink'	belly-ache
tuvi-mbinj	tuvi, 'shit'; mbinj, 'bird'	vulture
makoso-langgu	makoso, 'penis'; langgu, 'water'	urine

The foregoing description of Kumina language in practice, cursory as it is, should suffice to show that the lexical items collected for this paper and set out below continue to live and to change, in line with larger linguistic processes occurring in this part of Jamaica. Most important, these 'Country' words continue to carry a semantic load shared by those who use them and to serve a significant communicative function; in a sense, they may

be said to form part of a 'second language' spoken by a diffuse, though quite visible, network of individuals dispersed over a wide area of eastern Jamaica. It is hoped that the admittedly sketchy treatment given the Kumina language herein will lead to growing interest in the Central African heritage in Jamaica and perhaps stimulate further studies by trained linguists.

### Kumina Lexicon<sup>37</sup>

All entries include location where they were collected, English gloss given by informant and suggested Kikongo cognate(s).<sup>38</sup> Kikongo identifications (made by Fu-Kiau) have in most cases been cross-checked with Bentley (1887) and Laman (1936) for definitions; those items which have been checked in this way are followed in brackets by the relevant author's initial and the page number on which the definition of the item in question is found (ex., "B-100" signifies "Bentley, page 100," and "L-100," "Laman, page 100"). All Jamaican Kumina words are rendered according to the phonemic orthography for Jamaican Creole used by Cassidy and LePage (1980: xxxix – xl). For the corresponding Kikongo words, an approximation of the orthography developed by Laman (1936) has been employed; however, vowel length and tone are not indicated. Kikongo identifications

considered questionable by the authors are marked with an asterisk.

This lexicon has benefited from additional data collected by Joseph Moore in several parts of St Thomas parish during the early 1950s. Dr Moore was kind enough to make a number of his field tapes available to the authors; these tapes include a large number of linguistic items, along with glosses, elicited from Kumina practitioners. Not only do these tapes strengthen the findings presented here, but they also provide us with a certain time depth (approximately three decades) and show that the Kumina "Country" language, at the lexical level, has changed relatively little during this period. Several items from these field tapes have been transcribed by the authors and included in this lexicon for comparison; they appear below the corresponding items collected by Bilby in 1978. (Items collected by Dr Moore are identified by the letters 'JM.')

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
1. Spring Garden	ankwínggi malávu	*akundi a malavu ('friends of liquor; liquor lovers') Specific to the southern region.
2. Arcadia	báнду; bánda (the deeper drum of the pair used in Kumina')	banda [L-15] (a type of drum; rhythm; meter')
Prospect	báнду; bánda ('drum')	
Spring Garden	báнду; bánda ('drum')	
3. Whitehall	báza nki ('friend')	nki a mbazi ('which friend') 'Mbazi' = 'friend, brother, comrade' [L-525]
4. Spring Garden	bázu ('fire')	mbazu [B-341; L-525] ('fire; heat')
Arcadia	bázu ('fire')	This is the usage in the southern region. 'Mbau' is also commonly used in the north
Port Antonio	bájo ('fire')	
5. Prospect	bilónggo ('obeah')	bilongo [L-38] ('medication; power used for healing')
Spring Garden	bilónggo ('obeah')	
JM	bilónggo ('obeah')	

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
6. Arcadia	bimbámbi ('huge types of food that the ancestors used to reap when they were living in Africa; large in size')	kimbambi; dimbambi [L-118; 248] ('type of gigantic bean which grows on a vine')
Prospect	bimbambi ('big')	
JM	bimbambi ('big')	
7. Spring Garden	bimbambi vála ('cotton tree')	bimbambi + vala ('an old cemetery; village of the ancestors') + ('branch of a tree; tree') [L-1045; 1046]
8. Spring Garden	bímbi ('heavy')	*avimba ('increasing in volume; becoming heavy') From the infinitive 'vimba,' meaning 'to increase in volume, to become heavy.' or nabimbi ('very dense') From the infinitive 'bimba,' meaning 'to increase in volume or intensity.'
9. Prospect	bítanbende ('banana')	bitabe; bitiba ('bananas') mbende [L-527] ('sort of striped banana')
10. Prospect	búta ('friend; man')	mbuta [B-345; L-543] ('term of address for one who is older, a chief, a head man, etc.')
JM	búta ('man')	
11. Arcadia	buzúngu ('cow')	*buzungu ('fenced in; surrounded') From the infinitive, 'zunga,' meaning 'to put a fence around'.
12. Arcadia	bwa ('dog')	mbwa [B-345; L-544] ('dog')
Prospect	bwa ('dog')	
Spring Garden	bwa ('dog')	
JM	mbwa ('dog')	
13. Spring Garden	chud, chúdi ('something that stinks')	nsudi [B-394; L-775] ('smell, odour')
JM	chúdi ('stink')	
14. Spring Garden	día ('to eat')	dia [B-259; L-113] ('to eat')
Arcadia	ndía ('to eat')	
Prospect	día ('to eat')	
JM	diá ('to eat')	



Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
15. Prospect	diámba ('ganja; marijuana')	dyamba; diamba [B-260; L-138] ( <i>'marijuana; Indian hemp'</i> )
Arcadia	diámba ('ganja')	It is often powdered and used as medicine for wounds; traditionally it was also smoked, both in ceremonies and normal contexts.
Spring Garden	diámba ('ganja')	
Danvers Pen	diámba ('ganja')	
JM	diámba ('ganja')	
16. Prospect	fúni ('ass')	funi; efuni [B-266; L-165] ( <i>'anus'</i> )
Arcadia	fúni ('your bottom')	
17. Spring Garden	fútfut ('evening')	fuku; fuka [B-144; L-158] ( <i>'night'</i> )
Prospect	fútfut ('night')	
JM	fútifuti ('night')	
18. Arcadia	fwa ('many')	*vwa ('nine')
Spring Garden	fwáfwa ('much, many')	When applied to a group of people, 'vwa' refers to an indeterminate number; in such contexts its meaning is similar to 'multitude'.
19. Arcadia	fwe ('dead; to die')	fwa [L-170] ( <i>'to die'</i> )
Prospect	fwa ('dead; to die')	
20. Arcadia	fwíidi ('dead; to die')	fwidi ('he died')
Prospect	fwíidi ('dead; to die; to kill')	Fwidi' is the preterite form of 'fwa,' 'to die'.
Spring Garden	fwíidi ('dead; to die')	
JM	kofwíidi ('to die')	
JM	fwíidi ('dead')	
JM	wíidi ('dead')	
21. Prospect	gáandu ('alligator')	ngandu [B-371; L-683] ( <i>'crocodile'</i> )
22. Spring Garden	gángga nkísi yákala ( <i>'obeah man'</i> )	nganga nkisi a yakala ( <i>'male ritual specialist; male specialist in curing and in herbal medicine'</i> ) [B-371; L-683, 684]
23. Spring Garden	gánggia ( <i>'cold; sickness; to have a cold'</i> )	*ngangi [L-684] ( <i>'irritable'</i> )
24. Spring Garden	gwándul ( <i>'red peas'; i.e. a type of bean in Jamaica'</i> )	wandu [L-1092] ( <i>'beans; small peas'</i> ) A particular type of bean that grows on a tree.

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
25. Arcadia	gwángkas ('old man')	ngwa-nkasi; ngwa-nkazi [L-696] ('uncle'; 'mother's brother') Sometimes used as a respectful term of address for any male elder.
Prospect	gwángkas ('old man')	
Spring Garden	gwángkas ('old man')	
JM	yákala gwángkas ('father')	
JM	gwángkas ('old man')	
26. Spring Garden	hosúnd ('mortar')	*esu; kisu ('a kind of bowl used to crush nuts and fruits in')
27. Prospect	jímbo ('money')	nzimbu; njimbu [B-378; L-828] ('money; beads; valuables')
Spring Garden	jímbo ('money')	
Port Antonio	jímbo ('money')	
Port Antonio	jímbo ('money')	
JM	jímbo ('money')	
28. Spring Garden	jíni ('vagina')	nzini; njini [B-378; L-829] ('vagina')
29. Spring Garden	jomantádi ('prison; workhouse')	
Arcadia	nzonamtádi ('jail')	nzo a mantadi ('House built with rocks; house in which rocks are kept')
Prospect	jrómantadi ('jail; workhouse')	Nzo' = house.
JM	jómantadi ('prison')	
30. Prospect	kalúnga ('the sea; sea water')	kalunga [B-288; L-207] ('the sea; ocean; the barrier between the terrestrial and spiritual worlds')
JM	kalúnga ('the sea')	
31. Arcadia	kandál ('a piece of cloth to be worn around the waist; a piece of cloth used to wrap parts of a corpse before burial')	kandalala [B-288; L-212] ('a very long measure of cloth, the length of out stretched arms; dead; stretched out and exposed to the air in order to be dried out [said of a corpse]')
Spring Garden	kandál ('clothes; a piece of cloth used to prepare a corpse for burial.')	
32. Arcadia	kándi ('coconut')	nkandi [B-288; L-709] ('palm nut; coconut')
York	kándi ('coconut')	Originally applied to 'palm nut,' but when coconuts were introduced, the word was applied to them.
Prospect	kándi ('coconut')	
Spring Garden	mukándi ('coconut')	
JM	kándi ('coconuts')	

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
33. Spring Garden	kangga seboké ('stop talking')	*kanga+ ? ('to tie') Also means, in some contexts, to stop, to lock up, to arrest.
34. Arcadia	kénto ('girl')	nkento [B-382; L-717] ('woman')
Prospect	kénto ('woman')	
Spring Garden	kent ('woman')	
Port Antonio	kénto ('woman')	
Whitehall	kénto ('Woman')	
Danvers Pen	kénto ('woman')	
JM	nkénto ('woman')	
35. Prospect	kénto vúmu kéne ('the woman is pregnant')	nkento vumu kena ('the woman is pregnant') Literally, 'the woman is with stomach.' 'Kena' is the present tense of 'kala,' 'to be'.
36. Arcadia	kindúmba (one who doesn't understand things)	kindumba [L-265] ('the state of being a young woman; prostitution')
Arcadia	ndúmba ('girl')	
37. Prospect	King Zámbe ('God above')	Nzambi a mpungu [B-406; L-821] ('God Almighty; the principle of the most powerful vitality')
Seaforth	King Zámbe ('God Himself')	
Spring Garden	King Zámbe ('God the Son')	
38. Spring Garden	kíngkala nggánji ('crab lice')	kinkela nianzi; kinkela nyanzi ('a sort of insect like a caterpillar which can be put on the body to kill lice') 'Kinkela' = destroyer.
39. Spring Garden	kiniúmba ('spirit; ghost')	kiniumba; kinyumba [B-399; L-287] ('a spirit')  It may be an ancestor spirit, in the form of a person; but it can also mean various other kinds of spirits or forces which can spark invisibly-caused actions.
Seaforth	kiniúmba ('spirit')	
Whitehall	kiniúmba ('spirit')	
Prospect	kiniúmba ('spirit')	
JM	kiniúmba ('spirit')	
40. Spring Garden	kinjála ('cultivation ground')	kianzala; kyanzala [L-365] ('court; outdoors; yard; open ground')
JM	kinjála ('land')	
41. Arcadia	kinúnu nkwané ('an old woman')	kinunu kwande ('only an older person')  Kinunu' can mean an older person of either sex. [B-300; L-286]
Prospect	kinúnu ('an old woman')	
Spring Garden	kinúnu ('an old woman')	
JM	yákala kinúnu ('mother')	

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
42. Prospect	kinzu ('bowl; pipe')	kinzu [B-300; L-289] ('pot; pipe')
Spring Garden	kinzu ('cup; container')	
Whitehall	kinzu ('pot')	
JM	kinzu ('pots')	
43. Spring Garden	kizám bilónggo yákala ('obeah man')	Kinzambi bilongo yakala ('man of God's medicine; the man who uses natural medicine')
Spring Garden	bilónggo yákala ('master of ceremonies')	The above construction is idiosyncratic; the correct Kikongo would be 'bakala dia bilongo bia Kinzambi.'
JM	bilónggo yákala ('obeah man')	
44. Prospect	kodónggo ('Kumina music and dance')	*kundunga [L-337] ('to beat, to strike, to slap')
Spring Garden	kodónggo ('Kumina drumming')	As in to beat a drum.
45. Arcadia	kómbo ('goat')	nkombo [B-384; L-725] ('goat')
Prospect	kómbo ('goat')	
York	kómbo ('cow')	ngombe ('cow')
Seaforth	ngómbe ('goat')	
Spring Garden	kómbo ('cow')	
Spring Garden	kónve ('goat')	
JM	kónve ('goat')	
46. Spring Garden	kúbla ('to play drum')	kubula ('to beat; to shoot; to wipe')
Whitehall	kábla nggúma ('play the drum')	This word can be used in reference to the beating of drums. It has a special use in the context of dances, in which it is shouted (the infinitive and imperative forms are the same) at dancers to excite and encourage them. When it is said, the dancers whip up their legs so as to make their costumes (often raffia) fly up in the air. kubula ('to dance in the middle of a gathering of people') [L-323]
47. Spring Garden	kukwéla; kukwéle ('morning')	kukiele; kukyele ('it is day now; between five and six o'clock in the morning')
Prospect	kukwéla ('before day; just before morning')	
Arcadia	kukwéle ('in the morning')	na kyele-kyele [L-368] ('at the first light of day')
JM	kukwéle ('day')	
48. Arcadia	kumbémbe ('nose')	*va mbombo ('at the nose') or, mbombo ('in the nose') [L-535]

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
49. Spring Garden	kumbéngge ('going to play drum')	*kubienga; kubyenga ('to call together; to assemble') Traditionally, in the Kongo, whenever people assembled, the drum was always used to call them together.
50. Arcadia	kuméika ('music; dance') Synonym for 'Kumina'.	*kumeka ('to attempt; to fight; to hex someone')
Prospect	kuméika ('Kumina dance')	
York	kuméika ('tambu dance')	
51. Every location	kúmina ('ceremonial dance and music') also, kúmina, krúmina, krímina	kumu [L-334] ('meter, melody, rhythms; to play a musical instrument') kumunu ('a particular style of drumming; the drum rhythms which are used to back the style of dancing known as "Madinga"')
52. Prospect	kúnga ('to dance')	*nkungi [L-734] ('funeral ceremony; feast')
JM	kúnga ('to dance; dancing')	
53. Spring Garden	kut ('clothes')	
Prospect	nkut, kut ('cloth')	nkutu [B-386] 'a type of sack made of raffia, pineapple, or twine')
JM	málo kut ('shoes')	
54. Spring Garden	kúyu ('spirit; ghost')	nkuyu; nkwiyi [B-387; L-737] ('spirit of an ancestor')
York	nkúyu ('duppy')	('Duppy is Jamaican Creole for 'ghost.') This always refers to an evil spirit which is not admitted to the world of the ancestors and having nowhere to go, returns to the community to make trouble for the living.
Seaforth	kúyu ('spirit')	
Prospect	kúyu ('spirit')	
55. Spring Garden	kwámbi ('give')	*kwambila ('to give applause; to give a request; to give a salutation') An esoteric word used in a ritual context, when one wants to speak; when people meet in a circle to solve a social problem, one must formally kneel and clap in order to request attention before speaking. The act is referred to as 'vana lukofi' normally, but the 'strong' esoteric word for it is 'kwambila'.
56. Spring Garden	kwémbi ('to dodge; to hide')	*kwamba ('to run away secretly')

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
57. Arcadia Prospect Whitehall JM	kwénda ('to go') kwénda ('to go') wénda ('to come') wénda ('to come')	kwenda [B-316; L-356] ('to go')
58. Arcadia Prospect Spring Garden JM	lámba ('to cook; cooking') lámba ('to cook') lámba ('to cook') lámba ('to cook')	lamba [B-319; L-380] ('to cook')
59. Prospect Seaforth Port Antonio JM	lánggu ('water') lánggu ('water') lánggu ('water') lánggu ('water')	nlangu [B-388; L-743] ('water')
60. Spring Garden	lánggi ('coffee')	nlangi [L-743] ('tobacco') In Kikongo, the same word which is used for drinking a liquid (nwa: 'to drink') is used for smoking tobacco (i.e., to 'drink' tobacco.)
61. Prospect	lúnggeta ('alligator')	lungwenia; lungweni [L-439] ('chameleon') The Jamaican term may be derived from a fusion of 'lungwenia' with English 'gator'.
62. Spring Garden Prospect Arcadia JM	léka ('to lie down') lóika ('sleep') léka nkwan ('to sleep') léka ('to sleep; lie down')	leka [B-320; L-387] ('to sleep')
63. Prospect  Spring Garden Arcadia	mabúba ('breadfruit')  mabúba ('breadfruit') mabúba ('breadfruit')	mabuba [L-58] ('edible fruits from a tree; green fruit')
64. Arcadia York Spring Garden Prospect	madiá ('food') madiá ('food') madiá ('food') Zámbi madiá ('food')	madya; madia [B-335; L-474] ('food')
65. Every location	madiám; madiáma (said by the lead drummer or another musician just before ending a song to indicate that it is coming to a close')	madiama; madyama ('the principle of ending or burying something, whether it be a conflict in the community, or something else')

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
66. Arcadia	makóni ('ganja')	nkoni [L-727] ('flowers or seeds of the hop plant') 'Nkoni' is the plural form of 'lukoni'.
67. Spring Garden Prospect	makóso ('penis') makása ('penis')	makoza ('lover') or, Makoso, a male name which is used to refer to someone whose actual name is not known; it may be used, by extension, to refer to the male organ.
68. Prospect	makútu ku ('a piece of cloth used to wrap a corpse before burial')	kutu [L-344] ('a corpse wrapped in a shroud') The proper plural form is 'bikutu,' rather than 'makutu.'
69. Spring Garden JM	maláandu ('wood; tree; stick') maláandu ('wood; bamboo')	malandu ('sprouts of the nkumbi tree') These are dried and used as fuel.
70. Spring Garden Spring Garden	maláandu matáku ('you sit down on a chair') matáku ('to sit down')	*malandu matakú [B-338] ('nkumbi tree' + 'buttocks') 'Malandu' is the plural form used to refer to the sprouts of a particular tree known as 'nkumbi.' The above combination would be used as an insult to a fat woman, implying that her derriere is so large that she requires the whole base of a tree to sit down.
71. Arcadia Prospect Seaforth Port Antonio JM	malávu ('rum') malávu ('rum') maláv ('rum') maláv ('rum') malávu ('rum')	malavu [B-336; L-486] ('wine')
72. Spring Garden Prospect JM	maléle ('clothes') maléle ('clothes') mayéle ('clothes')	minlele; nlele (L-744) ('clothes, clothing')
73. Prospect	malémbe ('a greeting')	malembe [B-336; L-487] ('in a gentle careful manner; gently, mildly, softly, patiently')
Spring Garden Arcadia Port Antonio JM	malémbe ('greeting') malémbe ('greeting') malémbe ('greeting') malémbe ('howdy-do')	Used often as a greeting
74. Prospect Arcadia Spring Garden JM	málu ('foot; leg') málu ('foot') málu ('foot') málo ('foot')	malu [B-127, 336; L-328] ('legs') Malu' is the plural form of 'kulu'.

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
75. Prospect	málu kengkétu ('shoes')	malu nkenkete ('cramping or paralysis of the feet or legs') An alternate form is 'nkenkete a malu'. mambu [B-336; L-490] ('words, talk')
76. Prospect JM	mámbu ('to talk') mámbu ('to talk')	
77. Arcadia	mandúmbe ('a high man')	*Ma ndumba (respectful term of address for a young woman)
78. Arcadia Prospect JM	matádi ('stone') matádi ('rock') matádi ('stones')	matadi [B-272; L-943] ('rocks; stones') The singular form is 'tadi'.
79. Spring Garden	matáku ('bed')	*mataku ku mfulu ('get to bed') Literally, 'put your ass on the bed.' 'Mataku' = buttocks; 'Mfulu' = bed. Common expression, said in bantering between man and woman.
80. Arcadia Prospect  Spring Garden	matíiba ('banana') kíiba ('banana')  matíiba ('banana')	tiba [B-429; L-970] ('banana') 'Kitiba' is also proper. The plural form is 'bitiba.'
81. Prospect Arcadia Seaforth Whitehall JM	matóto ('earth; grave; ground') matóto ('stone; earth') matóto ('grave') matóto ('grave') matóto ('ground')	ntoto [B-401; L-799] ('earth; soil')
82. Prospect  Prospect	mawéle ('basket')  wéle ('pocket')	wele ('a type of material used to make baskets; the type of plant which yields this material') The proper plural form is 'biwele'.
83. Prospect	mayéni ('woman's breasts')	mayene; mabene [B-275; L-1127] ('breasts') The singular form is 'yene,' or bene'.
84. Spring Garden	mázaman ('cool water')	maza [B-339; L-514] ('water') 'Maza ma nzizia' means 'cold water.'
85. Prospect 86. Prospect Arcadia  Seaforth JM	mázi ('oil') mbéle ('knife') mbéle ('machete; thing used for chopping; knife') mbéle ('machete') mbéle ('machete')	mazi; maji [B-335; L-515] ('oil') mbele [B-342; L-526] ('knife')



Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
87. Arcadia Prospect	mbĩizi ('meat') mbĩizi ('meat')	mbizi; mbiji [B-342; L-532] ('meat')
88. Spring Garden Prospect	mbólo ('bread') mbólo ('bread')	mbolo ('bread; cake') A very heavy kind of bread similar to a cake; it is sweet and is made with beans and maize and, sometimes, peanuts. (Originally from Portuguese.)
JM	bólo ('bread')	
89. Spring Garden	móna montíti ('young infant')	*mwana + butete ('child' + 'baby')
90. Spring Garden	móna nchánchi ('female child')	*mwana a nsi ('child of the country') 'Mwana kia nsi' would mean the same thing, but it is incorrect usage for 'kia' belongs to the wrong class of prepositions to be used in this context.
91. Spring Garden	mpwénte ('man')	mpw'eto ('our friend; our colleague') mpwa = friend; eto = our.
92. Prospect	munchéngga ('sugar cane')	munsi; munsye; munsie; munse [B-359; L-616, 617] ('sugar cane')
93. Arcadia	mundéla ('brown man')	mundela; mundele [B-358; L-609] ('white man, European')
Spring Garden	mundéle ('a white man with money')	
Prospect	mundéle yákala ('white man')	
JM	mundéle ('white; white man')	
94. Prospect	méso ('eyes')	meso [B-347; L-550] ('eyes')
Spring Garden	méso ('eyes')	
Arcadia	méso ('eyes')	
95. Arcadia	múnga ('salt')	mungwa [B-358; L-612] ('salt')
Spring Garden	múnggra ('salt')	
Prospect	múnggwa ('salt')	
JM	múnggra ('salt')	
96. Spring Garden	munggwánzi ('Satan; duppy')	*Mungwandi (singular of 'Ngwandi')
Spring Garden	munggwándi ('duppy')	'Ngwandi' (plural 'Bangwandi') is a tribe in Northwestern Zaire. These people live in the forest and, for this reason, the Bakongo have traditionally associated them with spirits.

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo-Form & Meaning and Gloss
97. Spring Garden	Múnggulung ('Satan, devil, evil')	Mpungu lunga ('the complete nkisi of the all-powerful Mpungu')  'Mpungu' is the name of a very strong nkisi (charm) used to prevent accidents, disasters or social problems. Before the arrival of the missionaries it was used to 'tie' all kinds of social events or problems, but also crimes – so that no one would know who committed them. Thus, it has a strong potential for evil.
98. Spring Garden	munvwándi; mundéle ('medical doctor')	*mvwandi ('the one who sits')  This can be extended to doctors, the implication being that while the nganga goes to work for patients, the European doctor sits and waits for patients to come to see him.
99. Arcadia Prospect Spring Garden JM JM	mwána ('child') móna ('baby') mwána ('child') móno ('small') kénto móno ('baby girl')	mwana [B-298; L-645] ('child')
100. Arcadia	mwána nléle ('a baby too young to walk')	mwana anele ('a baby still being nursed, or in the cradle') 'Anlele' is derived from the infinitive 'lela,' meaning 'to take care of, to embrace, to lull.' This usage is specific to Zombo and other southern regions.
101. Arcadia Prospect JM	mwiiiv ('thief; to steal') mwiiiv ('to steal') mwíivi ('thief')	mwivi [B-364; L-651] ('robber')
102. Arcadia  Prospect Port Antonio Danvers Pen JM JM	nchúnga ('tobacco')  chúnga ('cigarette; tobacco') chiánga ('cigarette') chúnga ('to smoke') chúnga ('smoking') nchúnga ('cigarette')	nsunga [B-394; L-778] ('tobacco; perfume')
103. Spring Garden  Prospect	nggánji ('chigger')  nggánji ('chigger')	nyanzi; nianzi; nianji [B-376] ('louse, lice; flies')
104. Arcadia Spring Garden	nggónde ('moon') nggómbe ('moon')	ngonda [B-373; L-691] ('moon') In the Zombo region, the word is pronounced 'ngonde.'

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
105. Spring Garden	nggónggolo ('bell')	ngonge; ngunga [B-374; L-695] ('bell') 'Ngelengele' is a common onomatopoeic form used to mean the ringing of a bell. or, eyongolo [B-275] ('ferret-bell')
106. Arcadia	nggúlu ('hog')	ngulu [B-374; L-694] ('pig')
Prospect	nggúlu ('pork, hog')	
Spring Garden	gúlu ('hog')	
York	nggúlu ('hog')	
JM	nggu ('pig')	
107. Arcadia	nggúma ('drum')	ngoma [B-373; L-690] ('drum')
Prospect	nggúma ('drum')	
Whitehall	gúma ('drum')	
Spring Garden	nggúma ('drum')	
108. Arcadia	nggwála ('rum')	malavu ma ngwala [B-375; L-696] ('alcoholic drink')
Prospect	nggwála ('rum')	
Spring Garden	nggwála ('rum')	
Port Antonio	gwála ('rum')	
109. Prospect	nĩni ('to drink')	nwini ('drank') 'Nwini' is the preterite from of 'nwa,' 'to drink.'
Port Antonio	nĩni ('to drink')	
JM	nĩni ('to drink')	
110. Prospect	njála ('hungry')	nzala [B-406; L-820] ('hunger')
Arcadia	njála ('hungry')	
Spring Garden	njála ('hungry')	
111. Spring Garden	nkéti ('rat')	*nkéti ansamba ('smallpox')  This expression is idiomatic; 'nketi' means 'artisan,' and 'ansamba' means 'tattoo.' The expression can refer both to smallpox and to a vaccination, which figuratively becomes a 'tattoo.'
112. Arcadia	nówa ('mouth')	n'nwa [B-402; L-809] ('mouth')
Prospect	nówa ('mouth')	
Spring Garden	nówa ('mouth')	
JM	nówa ('mouth')	
113. Prospect	nvála ('the earth')	*mvwala ('cane; authority') mvala ('small trees of the savannah; land covered by those trees')

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
114. Prospect	nzo ('house')	nzo [B-407; L-829] ('house')
Spring Garden	nzo ('house')	
Arcadia	nzo ('house')	
Port Antonio	nzo ('yard')	
JM	nzo ('house')	
115. Spring Garden	okwémba kwe ('he is a fool')	*o kwenda kwe (‘where are you heading?’) Common in southern regions. It may be asked of someone who seems to have nowhere to go and nothing to do and who walks around aimlessly.
116. Spring Garden	omiambúdu ('breadfruit')	*mia mbutu ('what comes from the fruit') mia = preposition 'of' mbutu = 'fruit'
117. Prospect	pánggia ('friend')	mpangi [B-353, L-575] ('elder brother, or sister, cousin, son or daughter to one's maternal aunt senior to one's self')
118. Arcadia	pányá wan lánggu (‘bring me water’)	umpana/umvana nlangu (‘give me some water’) ‘Umpana’ is an old form of ‘give’ (imperative) which is still often used in informal speech in several areas; the proper form in literary Kikongo is ‘umvana.’ ‘Nlangu’ = water.
119. Spring Garden	péngge ('finger')	pengo [L-848] ('the length of the hand or foot, used as a unit of measurement')
120. Arcadia	pukú ('rat')	mpuku [L-587] ('rats; mice')
121. Arcadia	putú ('a person who is not real African')	mputu [L-590] ('Europe; place where a white people come from; world of the ancestral dead') 'Mputu' is derived from 'putulukez,' a corruption of 'Portuguese.'
122. Spring Garden	sála ('to give')	sala [L-868] ('to work')
JM	sála ('to build')	
123. Prospect	sála bilónggo ('to work obeah')	sala + bilongo ('to work; to make') + ('medication; power used for healing')
Arcadia	sála bilónggo ('working obeah')	

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
124. Spring Garden	sála mwána ('to give birth')	sala mwana (literally, 'to make a child') 'Sala' = 'to make.' This combination would not be found in Kikongo, however, since 'sala' usually has the sense of 'to make with the hands.' The proper expression is 'buta mwana,' 'to give birth to a child'. or, ku-zala [Shaba Swahili] ('to give birth') ku-zaa [East Coast Swahili] ('to give birth')
125. Spring Garden	sánji ('palm fronds; hair')	sanzi ('the upper part of a palm tree; the 'tuft' formed by the ensemble of fronds')
Prospect	sánji ('hair')	
JM	sánji ('hair')	
126. Spring Garden	sémbele mbéle ('machete')	nsengele a mbele [B-392] ('knife without a handle') In Kikongo this refers to a knife or machete that can't be worked with, because it lacks a wooden handle and the metal shank remains bare.
127. Spring Garden	shúkulu ('to wash')	sukula [B-420; L-921] ('to wash')
Prospect	chúkula ('to wash')	
Arcadia	súkula ('to wash')	
128. Arcadia	síka nggúma ('playing the drum')	sika ngoma [B-465; L-895] ('to play the drum')
Prospect	síka nggúma ('to play the drum')	
Port Antonio	sékia nggóma ('to play the drum')	
JM	sakángguma ('playing the drum')	
129. Prospect	súsu ('fowl')	nsusu [B-395; L-780] ('fowl')
York	nsúsu ('fowl')	
Seaforth	súsu ('fowl')	
Spring Garden	súsu ('fowl')	
Whitehall	súsu ('fowl')	
JM	nsúsu ('fowl')	

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
130. Arcadia Prospect  Seaforth Spring Garden JM JM	swígidi ('sugar') swígidi ('sugar')  swíkidi ('sweetened water') swígidi ('sugar') swíkidi ('sugar') nswíkidi ('candy')	nswikidi; sukadi [B-396; L-782] ('sugar') Nswikidi' is common in southern regions, and 'sukadi' is more common in the north.
131. Spring Garden Arcadia	támbu ('drums') támbu ('music')	ntambu ('a type of small drum') 'Ntambu' is used for both singular and plural.
132. Spring Garden	tánfu ('bamboo stilts; walking on stilts')	*tamvula [L-951] ('to walk unsteadily, as a crab walks') This may be used to describe walking on bamboo stilts.
133. Arcadia Prospect Spring Garden JM	táwa ('head') tówa ('head') táwa ('head') tówa ('head')	*ntu [B-401; L-799] ('head')
134. Spring Garden	tiámbe ('thank you')	tya; tia [L-970] ('to thank') In Northern region. or, tyambe; tiambe ('thanked') Preterite tense of 'tiemba' ('to thank, to love'), in Bembe dialect.
135. Prospect	tiéngga ('to fuck')	tyemba; tiemba [B-429; L-1010] (to copulate') tyenga; tienga [L-1010] (to rock, to swing; to dance, rolling one's belly')
136. Prospect  Spring Garden	tiéte mbinj (a particular small bird') tiéte mbinj ('bird')	ntyetye mbinza [L-805] (very small birds')
137. Prospect Spring Garden	tíki ('woods') tíki ('woods; trees')	nti [B-398; L-793] ('tree') The plural from is 'minti.' The Jamaican word may represent a fusion of 'nti' with the Jamaican Creole word 'tik/tiki,' meaning 'stick'.
138. Spring Garden Prospect	twála ('to look') tála ('to look')	tala [B-423; L-946] ('to look')

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
139. Spring Garden	twála ('to understand')	*twala 'Twala' is an esoteric word used as a response to a priest who is blessing one. It means, 'I am ready for what you are saying, for the result.'
140. Spring Garden Prospect	túvi ('shit') túvi ('shit')	tuvi [B-437; L-1004] ('shit')
141. Prospect JM	vála ('mule; horse') nválo ('donkey')	mvalu [B-359; L-632] ('horse') Probably derived from Portuguese 'cavallo'.
142. Spring Garden	vóngga ('to heat up; to boil')	*vonga ('to be increased in volume')
143. Spring Garden Seaforth Prospect JM	vúla ('rain') vúla ('rain') vúla ('rain') mvúla lwek ('rain')	mvula [B-361; L-638] ('rain')
144. Prospect  Spring Garden	vúmbi ('breeze') It should be noted that in Jamaican Creole, 'breeze' refers to a strong wind such as accompanies a storm. vúmbi ('breeze')	mvumbi [L-638] ('a very long and violent rain')
145. Port Antonio	vúmbi ('spirit')	mvumbi [L-638] ('dead person; cadaver') In the Bembe dialect.
146. Prospect  Spring Garden JM Arcadia	vúmu ('belly')  vúmu ('belly') vúmu ('belly') vúmu kìnini ('pregnant woman')	vumu [B-455; L-1027] ('stomach, abdomen')  vumu kikinini ('the belly has danced') 'Vumu' means 'belly.' 'Kikinini' is the present perfect of 'kina,' 'to dance'. 'Kina' is sometimes used as a metaphor for sex.
147. Spring Garden	vúmu tímu ('woman becomes pregnant')	*vumu tindi ('the belly is full') Can be used as an idiomatic expression, meaning 'pregnancy.'
148. Spring Garden	vwáni ('liar')	vuni ('liar; one who lies, tricks, deceives')
149. Spring Garden	vwáni ('soft')	navwani ('very, very softly') An adverb

Place	Jamaican Kumina "Country"	Kikongo Form & Meaning and Gloss
150. Arcadia Prospect	wĩlangga ('hearing') wĩlangga ('to hear')	wilanga ('hearing') 'Wilanga' is the gerundive or participial form of 'wa,' 'to hear'.
151. Prospect	wĩiza, kwĩiza ('to come')	kwiza [B-318; L-360] ('to come')
152. Prospect Spring Garden Arcadia JM	yákala ('man') yákala ('man') yákala ('man') yákala ('man')	yakala; balaka [B-274; L-9, 1111] ('man')
153. Arcadia Prospect Spring Garden	yála ('to marry') yála ('to marry') yála ('to marry')	*yala [L-112] ('to govern; to display') bala; kobala (Lingala) ('to marry')
154. Spring Garden Prospect	yámute ('strong') yámbute ('strong')	ambote ('good, beautiful, strong') 'Ambote' is usually modified by a prefix which must accord with the class of the noun to which it is referring. For example: Singular – nzo yambote Plural – nzo zambote Singular – muntu wambote Plural – bantu bambote
155. Spring Garden	yétuwayet ('a friend')	yeto na yeto ('among ourselves') This is the form used in southern regions; in the north, the expression is 'beto na beto.'
156. Spring Garden	yétuwayet wan kwĩiza mpanggi am ('one African')	wiza mpangi ami, yetu a yetu ('come, my brother, we are amongst ourselves')
157. Arcadia  Spring Garden Prospect Prospect JM	Zámbi Ampúngu ('thunder is rolling')  Zámbi Ampúngu ('God the Father') Zámbi ('God') Zámbi Ampónggo ('God is rolling thunder') Zámbi ('sky god')	Nzambi a mpungu [B-406; L-821] 'God Almighty; the principle of the most powerful vitality'



## Notes

1. For background on the Rastafari brethren, see Barrett (1977), Owens (1976), Simpson (1955) and Smith et al. (1960).
2. For the unsubstantiated view that Kumina is primarily Dahomean in background, see Patterson (1969: 199–202). The idea that it is Akan-derived has been most enthusiastically argued by Leonard Barrett (1974), who asserts, on the basis of extremely tenuous evidence, that it is a transplanted version of 'the Ashanti form of ancestor worship' (ibid: 61). See also Long (1972: 18). Barrett also states – with no basis – that Kumina 'is the oldest of the African cults to emerge in the New World complex of cults and must be compared in age with Vodun in Haiti, Shango in Trinidad, Santeria in Cuba and similar cults of its kind in Brazil' (ibid: 69). See also Barrett (1976: 25–27), where the author erroneously traces the word Kumina to the Twi language. Hogg (1964: 160–61) and Kerr (1952: 144) have suggested that Kumina originated among the Maroons living in the eastern part of Jamaica. These various views do not stand up to the more recent work of Lewis (1977), Brathwaite (1978), and Schuler (1980), which shows that *Kumina* is clearly primarily of Central African derivation. Earlier writers who stressed a Central African background for Kumina are Seaga (1956), LePage (1960: 94) and Jacobs (1974: 33). That Kumina was introduced to Jamaica after Emancipation by free African immigrant labourers was also suggested earlier by LePage (1960: 94), Jacobs (1965: 93; 1974: 33), Lowenthal (1972: 116) and Seaga (1969: 4). See also Bilby (1981a: 81–88) and Schuler (1980: 123–24) for discussions of the problems with several of the earlier attempts to pin down the origins of Kumina. The Kongo background of Kumina has only recently begun to receive wider recognition in Jamaica. In *The Sunday Gleaner Magazine* of December 5, 1982, for instance, an article by Laura Tanna entitled 'Kumina: The Kongo Connection' appeared. This article, written in response to the publication of Monica Schuler's '*Alas, Alas, Kongo*', discusses the early fieldwork of Edward Seaga (the present Prime Minister of Jamaica), who collected a number of 'African Country' words from Kumina practitioners during the 1950s, several of which he was later able to identify as Kikongo-derived. See Seaga (1956).
3. For evidence of this, see Schuler (1980: 9, 68–69, 112–13).
4. Results of this research appear in Bilby (1979) and have been published in Bilby (1980), (1981a), (1981b) and Bilby and Steady (1981). It should be made clear here that the Maroons and the people who practise Kumina are two completely separate groups, with different historical backgrounds. (There has been a good deal of confusion about this in the past.) Whereas the Maroons are the descendants of slaves who escaped from Jamaican plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and fled to the forests to form their own societies, the Kumina people claim that *their* tradition has been passed on from post-Emancipation African immigrants who came to Jamaica in the 19th century. Although these two groups share roughly the same region of the island, members of both emphasise that the Maroons and Kumina (Bongo) people represent two distinct 'nations.' See Bilby (1981a: 81–88). For general background information on the Jamaican Maroons, see Dallas (1803), Kopytoff (1973) and Williams (1938).
5. Among the author's previous publications are K. Kia Bunseki (1969a), (1969b), (1970) and (1980). Aside from his collaboration with Brathwaite (1978) on Jamaican Kumina, he has contributed his expertise in the area of Kongo culture to a large number of scholarly works, including Janzen and MacGaffey (1974), MacGaffey (1970), Thompson (1978) and Thompson and Cornet (1981). The present paper came about as a result of an exchange of ideas between the co-authors beginning in 1979, which finally resulted in collaborative work during the summer of 1980. The authors wish gratefully to acknowledge the helpful comments of Professors Johannes Fabian, Richard Price, Ian Hancock and Jean Comhaire, on an earlier draft of the paper. Thanks are due as well to Joseph Moore, who made available valuable field materials collected during the 1950s.
6. The only serious, long-term anthropological research on Kumina to date is that conducted during the early 1950s by Joseph Moore, a student of Herskovits. Moore's trail-blazing study resulted in a doctoral dissertation (1953) which continues to be *the* basic source on Kumina. A portion of the results of this research is available in published form, in Moore (1965), (1979) and Simpson and Moore (1957–8).

7. Some comment is necessary here on a major discrepancy between Moore's data from the 1950s and that collected by Schuler, one of the present authors (Bilby), and others. Moore (1953: 189–225) lists a large number of Kumina 'sky gods' and 'earthbound gods' which, according to him, formed part of an intermediate pantheon of deities between the one supreme deity and the ancestral spirits. However, the Kumina informants with whom one of the present authors (Bilby) worked in several parts of St Thomas parish all stated that the only possessing spirits they knew of in Kumina were the spirits of *ancestors*. None of the Kumina devotees with whom Bilby spoke recognised any deities (or 'gods') other than the supreme deity, *King Zambi*, or *Zambi Ampunggu*. The same point has been made by Schuler (1977: 228), whose Kumina informants also failed to recognise any intermediate deities. When Bilby read Moore's list of 'sky gods' and 'earthbound gods' to Kumina devotees, only a few of the names elicited any reactions; those names which *were* recognised – such as Adabrak, Jubi or Balaam – were said to be 'air spirits' or 'fallen angels' (a kind of supernatural being normally associated not with Kumina, but rather, primarily with urban 'science' traditions and foreign 'black magic' books [see Hogg 1961]; Bilby was told that such 'fallen angels' may occasionally be used in Kumina for 'working science' although they never possess dancers). According to Moore (ibid: 132), the 'earthbound gods' he was told of were identified with 'fallen angels', but like the ancestral spirits, they commonly took possession of devotees and used their bodies to dance. We must conclude, therefore, that both the terminology and basic concepts of Kumina practitioners regarding the spirit world have undergone major changes in the three decades that have elapsed since Moore conducted his fieldwork. From all indications, Kumina is no longer a cult with a multi-tiered pantheon of deities, but has become a purely 'ancestral religion'. It should be added that, to the best of Bilby's knowledge, the word 'zombie' is no longer in current use, to refer to possessing spirits or possessed dancers (see Moore 1953: 277); today 'Zambi' or 'King Zambi' refers only to the supreme deity.
8. Moore (1953: 123) states of the 'tribes' named by Kumina people: 'the five usually mentioned are *mondogo*, *moyenge*, *machunde*, *kongo* and *mumbaka*'. These would correspond, respectively, to those Kumina 'tribes' which we have spelled: *mondongo*, *muyanji*, *munchundi*, *kongo* and *mumbaka*.
9. All direct quotes from Jamaican informants in this paper have been transcribed directly from tape-recorded interviews. Several problems arise when attempting to transcribe texts recorded in an area displaying a 'post-creole continuum' of linguistic forms, such as Jamaica (see DeCamp 1971). We were faced with the following choices: 1) to render the texts in the phonemic orthography for Jamaican Creole used by Cassidy and LePage (1980: xxxix–xi); 2) to translate the texts into standard English; 3) to render the texts in standard English orthography, without changing the original creole grammatical structure. Whereas the first choice would have resulted in texts unintelligible to most readers, the second, we believe, would have robbed the texts of a certain immediacy which we felt should be maintained in the context of a paper such as this. We decided, therefore, to take the third course. Those who are familiar with the workings of the creole continuum in Jamaica will recognise immediately that most of these texts tend to stay within the 'mesolectal' range and this made their rendering in standard English orthography that much easier; it also means that the texts, for the most part, will be intelligible to readers who understand standard English. There are, however, drawbacks to this decision as well, the most serious being that texts presented in this way may appear to native English-speakers, with their unconscious biases, as broken-down, incomplete or otherwise imperfect examples of their own language. Needless to say, Jamaican Creole is a 'legitimate' language-form in its own right and the phonemic modifications made in these texts (for example, 'lik' becomes 'little', 'kyaan' becomes 'can't', 'dem': or 'dey' become – since English *th* [ð] is a phoneme which doesn't even occur in Jamaican Creole – 'them' or 'they', etc.) do not do it justice. Nonetheless, we have rendered the texts as we have so as to make them readily accessible to a wider readership than might otherwise have been possible. (The occasional 'creolisms' which could not be rendered in standard English orthography are explained in adjacent parentheses.)
10. Interestingly, according to Cassidy and LePage (1980: 130), the term 'creolian' was used from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries to refer to persons born in the West Indies of European parents.

11. In neighbouring Haiti, the word 'Mondongue' refers to a *loa*, or deity in Vodou ceremonies, as well as an African 'nation'. See Comhaire-Sylvain and Comhaire (1995: 14), where the authors trace the derivation of Mondongue to Kikongo 'Ndunga' ('name of a secret society').
12. The sense of the term 'Creole Bongo' is that of 'a member of the Bongo Nation born in Jamaica, rather than Africa.' The term 'salt-water Bongo' is particularly interesting. According to Cassidy and LePage (1980: 391), the expression 'salt-water Negro' was used in the eighteenth century by Jamaican-born slaves to refer to those born in Africa. (The term is mentioned by contemporary writers such as Edward Long.) However, Cassidy and LePage do not make mention of any similar expression – like 'salt-water Bongo' – being carried down to the present. Although the term seems to have had pejorative connotations in eighteenth-century Jamaica, Kumina people endow the term 'salt-water Bongo' with purely positive meanings and use it to express admiration and respect.
13. It should be mentioned that 'malaika' means 'angel' in Swahili (originally from Arabic) and this alternative derivation cannot be ruled out as a possibility.
14. Many Jamaicans know the name 'Mother Prudie' from the well-known mento (folk song) that was composed about her:

*Mother Prudie da bawl out me name  
 Mother Prudie da bawl out me name  
 Mother Prudie da bawl out me name  
 oh, me naa go back a Somerset again*

It is said that shortly before her death Mother Prudie repented for all the evil she had done and yelled out the names of all those who had paid her to cast spells against others, so that the entire village could hear. It is to this incident that the above song refers.

15. For background on the Convince cult (also known as 'Flenke,' 'Fenke,' 'Bongo' or '61 Revival') and its possible relationship to both Kumina and Maroon religion, see Hogg (1960; 1964) and Bilby (1981a: 81–88).
16. Apparently, Monica Schuler (1980) also heard the name of this great drummer, but rendered it mistakenly as 'Bob O'Brien' (ibid: 109) – if in fact the famous drummer she mentions and the one to whom I refer are the same person.
17. This section of the paper relates to oral traditions carried down from the nineteenth-century African immigrants. For other recent

studies dealing with the experiences of post-Emancipation African immigrants and their descendants in the New World, see Warner (1971a), (1971b), (1972–3); Schuler (1971); and Trotman (1976). For discussions of the importance of post-Emancipation African immigration to an understanding of Afro-American culture in the Caribbean, see Smith (1965: 33–34) and Mintz and Price (1976: 28–31). For general background on indentured African immigration into Jamaica in the nineteenth century, see Thomas (1974) and Schuler (1980). Chapters 4–7 (45–109) of the latter work, concentrating on the immigrant experience, complement the information we present in this paper very nicely.

18. Hordley and Holland were two of the several nineteenth-century plantations in St Thomas parish to which post-Emancipation immigrant labourers were assigned. See Schuler (1980: 49).
19. Similar stories about flying back to Africa are found among Afro-Americans in several parts of the Americas. See Schuler (1980: 93–96), where a number of very similar texts from Kumina people are presented. Schuler is now at work on a paper specifically about this intriguing topic.
20. A variant of the first two songs, with their 'Guinea bird' metaphor, is also sung by the Maroons of Moore Town. It is unclear whether the song originated with the Maroons and was borrowed by the 'Bongo Nation,' or the other way around. But in any case, it has a similar significance between both groups (the Maroons, like the St Thomas 'Africans,' possess traditions about flying back to Africa and the negative effects of eating salt). See Dalby (1971: 49–50) for a notated version of the song, collected by the author from a Maroon woman. Cassidy and LePage (1980: 213) state that 'Guinea bird,' like 'salt-water negro,' was used in the eighteenth century to refer derogatorily to slaves born in Africa, as opposed to 'creoles,' born in Jamaica.
21. Monica Schuler (1980: 108–109) ends her study with a rather dramatic story which appears – though it makes no mention of 'Busha Landiman' – to be a variant of this oral tradition. Her informant apparently told her the story was related to the events surrounding the Morant Bay rebellion (1865); but none of those quoted in the present paper made that connection. If the 'Bob O'Brien' mentioned in the version given to Schuler (ibid) – said to have played the drums at this time with Manoka Mvula – is the same Babu Bryan who

- died fairly recently and if he *was* in fact present for those events, then they could not possibly have occurred as early as 1865. Clearly, there is some confusion in the account given here. At any rate, all three of the informants quoted here explicitly connected the story to a white property-owner, 'Busha Landiman,' and the land dispute he initiated. Further research would be necessary to determine whether or not this dispute was somehow connected to the Morant Bay rebellion.
22. Paul Bogle is now an official National Hero in Jamaica. For background on Bogle's rebellion and its aftermath, see Olivier (1933) or Semmel (1963). Mention of the involvement of post-Emancipation African immigrants in the rebellion – and particularly their punishment afterwards – can be found in Harvey and Brewin (1867) and Olivier (1933). Olivier (*ibid*: 235) states that after the rebellion had been crushed, 'along the road from Bath, round the East end of the Island ... nineteen out of every twenty of the people taken and punished were Africans [i.e., post-Emancipation immigrants] or women.'
23. In an interesting passage, Joseph Moore (1953: 13) reports that the memory of Bogle remained very much alive in St Thomas during the 1950s and continued to be associated with protest against unjust living conditions. At the time, some people even claimed that his spirit was known to possess Kumina-dancers:
- A number of people in the Morant Bay area have recorded their opinion that unless there is a real change, 'Paul Bogle will return again'. He is well known at cult ceremonies where he comes as an ancestral zombie to take possession of the body of a dancing zombie for periods of the dance.
24. The linguist Ian Hancock (personal communication, March 25, 1983) suggests that the original version of this song might be rendered in Yoruba as follows:
- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| Inu mi dun fe | I am glad a long time |
| Jesu fe mi    | Jesus loves me        |
| Jesu fe mi    | Jesus loves me        |
| Jesu fe mi    | Jesus loves me        |
| Inu mi dun fe | I am glad a long time |
| Jesu fe mi    | Jesus loves me        |
| Jesu fe mi    | Jesus loves me        |
| Se fe mi      | Surely loves me       |
25. It must not be forgotten that by the mid-nineteenth century the Kongo Kingdom was nominally 'Christian'. There are thus no grounds for assuming that the nineteenth-century Central African immigrants to Jamaica were completely 'untouched' by Christianity before they left Africa.
26. For a detailed account of the corrupt practices of labour recruiters, the poor treatment accorded the African immigrants, and the difficult conditions facing them, see Schuler (1980: 23–29, 45–64).
27. For a number of similar tales collected in Haiti, as well as several parallel tales (some of them Kongo) from Kinshasa, Zaire, see Comhaire-Sylvain (1938) and Comhaire-Sylvain (1974).
28. For another discussion of this *Tiete Mbinj* (in this case, rendered 'Tatimbeenj') of the Jamaican Kumina people, see Brathwaite (1978: 53–54). Our analysis here overlaps with that of Dr Brathwaite, although it is not identical. (Brathwaite's discussion – based on a single tape-recorded interview with a prominent Kumina devotee – contains several insightful comments; but he unfortunately adds to these a number of unwarranted assumptions, arrived at by extrapolating from very ambiguous data collected by Moore and others). Stories of this sort do not appear to be told in a group setting, but rather, to be passed on informally from individual to individual. The man quoted here prefaced his story with: 'My grandfather ... used to tell me a story.' Most of those interviewed for this study indicated that their Kumina knowledge had come to them via a number of similar linear paths.
29. Barrett (1976: 25), for instance, assumes a Twi derivation, whereas Cassidy and LePage (1980: 267), much closer to our own derivation, suggest Kimbundu *kumona*, 'to see; possession.' Kimbundu is the language of the Mbundu or Ndongo people, who live just to the south of the Kongo region, in Angola; this is the same group referred to earlier in this paper in connection with the Jamaican Kumina word 'mondongo' (meaning 'stranger', or one not trained in the Kumina tradition.)
30. The word 'Kumunu' is but one of many related Kongo words which are likely connected to the Jamaican word 'kumina' (itself sometimes alternately pronounced 'kumuna' or 'krumuna'). In order to give some idea of the semantic complexities involved here, it is necessary to go into a bit more detail. The term *Kumina*, in Kikongo, is first of all a verb that expresses

- a rhythmic motion. It signifies the following concepts; to move or act rhythmically (e.g., as when tilling a field); to move quickly, or make quick body movements (e.g., while eating, dancing, jumping); to initiate an action; to head speedily towards a destination or goal; to make a quick decision. (Synonyms of *kumina* are *zomina* and *bingila*.) This verb is commonly used in expressions such as: *kumina salu*, to work speedily and rhythmically (very often while singing); *kumina ntangu*, literally, to run after the sun (to run with time); *kumina makinu*, to speed up a dance (or the noun, *makinu* *mankumina*, sped-up dancing); *bonga kumunu*, to start a melody or rhythm. The verb *kumina* is itself a derivative of *kuma* (to run, to hunt; to erect, to ground, to initiate, to beat, to damn, to chase, to cement, to begin) and is related as well to the verb *kumu* (to play a musical instrument) and the noun *kumu* (meter, melody, rhythm) (Laman 1936: 334). As a noun (with synonyms *tudulu*, *lwakulu* and *vundulu*), *kumina*, of nominative class 'di-ma' or 'ki-bi,' signifies destination, stop, shelter, end, finality (ibid). Clearly, a large number of interrelated concepts cluster around this important word, all of which have significance when viewed in the context of the Jamaican Kumina religion. In indigenous Kongo philosophy, 'kumina,' in its more general metaphorical sense, refers to a deep-rooted rhythmic motion, often tapped through singing, which flows through and nurtures the human mind towards its transcendental finality; this fundamental Kongo concept has remained at the heart of the Jamaican *Kumina* religion.
31. Recorded examples of Jamaican Kumina music can be found on Lewin (n.d.), Seaga (1956), Bilby (1975) and Bilby and Leib (1983). *Jamaica Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, includes a short article on Kumina music and a companion recording with examples of Kumina.  
See also Reckord (1977) which includes a brief discussion of Kumina in relation to Rastafari music. Further examples of Kumina music, performed in non-traditional settings, are to be found on an LP released by the Organization of American States, 'Canciones Tradicionales del Caribe' (OEA-005, 1979) and on 'Third World,' the first LP by the Jamaica reggae band of the same name (Island ILPS -9369-A, 1976). Recordings of Kongo Kumunu are harder to locate, but a stylised studio version, 'Souviens-toi Madinga,' which gives some idea of the rhythmic foundation of the music, can be found on an LP entitled 'Percussions,' by N'Kouri (Sacem I.D. 10.002, Paris). More difficult to locate is a 78-rpm, 'Otoko Mpena Ebondia,' by George Edouard, Manuel Oliveira ye Mpangi Zau (Ngoma Records, C1-489) which features a traditional Madinga/Kumunu group under a (not traditional) two-guitar ensemble, with voices. Persistent seekers will doubtless be able to find other, better examples recorded more recently in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo).
  32. A few good examples (unfortunately not well-recorded) of Kumina Country songs can be found on Seaga (1956). The notes to this LP include a number of 'Country' words collected by Seaga, along with English glosses.
  33. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient space here to discuss phonology. It is interesting to note, however, that Kumina people speak 'Country' with a very distinct Bazombo 'accent' (the Bazombo are a Kongo sub-group located in the southern region, between Kimpese and Kimpangu). This area deserves further research.
  34. An almost identical expression is commonly heard among the Bakongo, in the form of a question: voku wilanga mu matu ko nga ku funi wilange? ('If you don't hear by your ears, will you hear by your ass?') The implication here is that one who does not listen to those in authority will suffer the consequences (including possible corporal punishment).
  35. One should bear in mind that several pidgin languages – some influenced by Portuguese or other European languages and some based on indigenous languages in contact – were probably in use in the Kongo region during the period when the indentured labourers were brought to Jamaica. The influence of such pidgins on the Kumina 'Country language' is a near-certainty.
  36. For a very readable general introduction to Jamaican Creole, see Cassidy (1971).
  37. A number of earlier studies have focused specifically on Kikongo (or other Bantu) linguistic contributions in other parts of the Americas. Among these are: Daeleman (1972), Granda Gutierrez (1973), Price (1975) and Vass (1979). Price (ibid) emphasises the need for greater sensitivity to socio-historical considerations in studies of this kind; we have tried to keep this in mind in preparing the present paper.  
See also Comhaire-Sylvain and Comhaire (1955) which deals with Kongo and other linguistic influences in Haiti.

38. It is important to note that the entries appearing in this lexicon represent a very large percentage of all the lexical items (for which glosses were given) collected by Bilby. That is to say, the entries have not *been* selected from a larger body containing a substantial number of other items which could easily be related to other African languages, such as Twi or Yoruba, for example. Those few lexical items which could not be traced to Kikongo appeared in most cases to have their origin in other Bantu languages. West African contributions such as are found in certain other parts of Jamaica seem to be very few in the Kumina 'Country' language. This would seem to add further support to the contention that the Kumina tradition was introduced to Jamaica by post-Emancipation (primarily Central African) indentured labourers.

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- g. 'Ngana' (literally, 'tradition') is here translated as 'the story.'
- h. 'Kuna yanda' is rendered 'among the ancestors.' It translates literally as 'there, below' (i.e., in the lower world, where the ancestors dwell).
- i. 'Going to the valley' would appear to be a metaphor for the world of the ancestors (below); in this case, it might mean going to an initiation - the initiation of an individual in the community.
- j. 'Musele' is a n'kisi ('charm') of love which is considered particularly powerful. It is used in attracting a desired partner.
- k. 'Ya' is a fond respectful (but familiar) term of address which precedes a person's name.
- l. 'Mbamba' is the name of a region in the central part of what was the Kongo kingdom.
- m. The phrase 'n'kanda ngunga' ('the skin of the bell') is ambiguous. It might refer to the insignia of a Kongo chiefdom (very often a leopard skin and after the introduction of the Christian religion, a metal bell). The expression 'Kongo dia Ngunga' arose from this situation to mean 'the Christianized Kongo' (literally, 'the Kongo of the bell').

### Notes for Music

- a. Munlembe (also known as 'muleba' or 'nzemba') - literally, a belt used to carry a child on the mother's back; also a belt made from a piece of cloth used to carry things under the arm. Also, a big rope which people grasp, to save themselves from some danger - by climbing up it.
- b. Literally, 'in the water.'
- c. 'Wele' should be 'bele,' in order to agree properly with the plural form, 'banyaku' (singular = 'wanyaku'); these are older forms of the word, not commonly used today. The modern usage is 'wayaku/bayaku.'
- d. 'Mbundu' (literally, 'heart') is here translated as 'memory.'
- e. 'Mimbombo' = a water-soaked log.
- f. 'Fwa dia bantu' (literally, 'legacy of the people') is here translated as 'memory of the people.'
- n. The singer here indicates that the song is over.
- o. 'Zebeze' seems to be a contraction of 'zeba-zeba' ('be calm').
- p. Zazi appears to be used here as a person's name (from 'Nzazi,' meaning 'thunder').
- q. A literal translation of 'kuzebil'andi' would be 'do not walk slowly,' and by extension, it might mean 'do not act slowly.'
- r. 'Nganga' has many meanings: ritual specialist; healer; curer; priest; etc.
- s. 'Sleeping' here meaning 'death.'
- t. 'Yeti' appears to be used here as a person's name, probably not of Kongo derivation.
- u. 'Boke' refers to a package full of gifts which is given to the bride's family (i.e., lineage) by the family of the groom; it is a form of bridewealth.



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*Edited by  
Markus Coester and Wolfgang Bender*



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